PREPARATION FOR DEATH

By St. Alphonsus De Liguroi

About the artist of the picture on the front cover:

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on June 2, 1942, Gary Patrick Stone attended the School of Fine Arts of UWM. Presently he works as a free-lance graphic designer and illustrator. Utilizing the Holy Gospels and the writings of St. Alphonsus De Liguori about the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ to foster his meditation on the sufferings of Our Lord, Gary produced this inspiring portrait of the Holy Face of Jesus which is based on the Holy Shroud of Turin. It's a result of his spiritual life and his youthful interest in the Holy Shroud of Turin.

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THE COMPLETE WORKS

OF

SAINT ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI,

DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH,

Bishop of Saint Agatha and Founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN.

EDITED BY

REV. EUGENE GRIMM,

Priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer.

THE ASCETICAL WORKS.

Volume I.

PREPARATION FOR DEATH;

OR,

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ETERNAL TRUTHS,

USEFUL FOR ALL AS MEDITATIONS AND SERVICEABLE TO PRIESTS FOR SERMONS.

(*MAXIMS OF ETERNITY.—RULE OF LIFE.*)

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OF
ST. ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI.

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(Maxims of Eternity—Rule of Life.)

BY

ST. ALPHONSUS DE LIGUORI,
Doctor of the Church

EDITED BY

REV. EUGENE GRIMM,
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† Patritius Cardinalis Hayes,
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Die 26 Julii, 1926

APPROBATION.

By virtue of the authority granted to me by the Most Rev. Patrick Murray, Superior-General of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, I hereby sanction the publication of the book entitled PREPARATION FOR DEATH, or Considerations on the Eternal Truths, which is Volume I. of the complete edition of the Works of St. Alphonsus de Liguori.

JAMES BARRON, C.SS.R.,
Provincial

BROOKLYN, N. Y., July 15th, 1926.

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1926

INTRODUCTION

St. Alphonsus says, "those who pray will be saved; those who do not pray will be condemned." Truly strong but necessary words we need to hear when we are living in a modern non-Christian culture. This book will help us meditate on the eternal truths which we hear so seldom. Scripture tells us that if we remember our last end, we will not sin. By reading this book and meditating on our last end and the eternal truths, we will become more perfect and sin less often and less grievously. If the book accomplishes that, it is worth much more than its weight in gold.

Thus, it is with great joy and sacrifice that we reprinted 70,000 copies of this great spiritual classic of St. Alphonsus, a doctor of the Church and one of the greatest saints. You must read this book to understand his great insights into Sacred Scripture and God's love shown to mankind in showing him the way of salvation and of perfection.

We know, as Christians, that our Lord has told us in St. Matthew's Gospel that we must let our light shine before men. We don't hide our light under a basket but let it shine for everyone to see.

So to let our light shine before men, we won't put this beautiful book in a drawer or on a book shelf or under a basket; we will let others see it by lending it to our poor neighbors who can't afford to buy a copy of it. It is better to lend the book than

give it away, or they may just put it on a shelf and only one more person reads the book.

By lending it, we can reach many people over a period of time. In fact, it is a zealous idea for everyone to buy extra copies of our favorite religious books and set up a small lending library to spread the light of the faith far and wide.

St. John Bosco said that only God knows the good that can come about by reading one good Catholic book.

Surely, this is so. I was given a vocation to the priesthood by reading a small book on the Blessed Virgin. My brother decided to become a priest also by reading a beautiful Catholic book called The Way of Divine Love.

St. Jerome says that when we pray we speak to God but when we read God speaks to us. St. Augustine, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. John Colombino all left the world and dedicated their lives completely to God, after reading a good spiritual book. Maybe the person to whom you lend this book will also dedicate his life to God or develop a deeper love of Him and His Mother. It will be your generosity and sacrifice which will have helped God accomplish this.

Remember that St. Teresa of Avila, one of the greatest mystics of the Church, couldn't meditate without a religious book during 20 years of her spiritual life. If this is so, how is it possible for most of us to do so?

St. Alphonsus tells us that without good books and spiritual reading, it will be morally impossible to save our souls.

So let us realize the importance of good reading materials and buy some extra copies for our friends and the poor or, at least, lend our copy to someone else.

This book will help Christians understand the necessity of praying.

Will you help me distribute this wonderful book? I have set quantity prices very low for this very reason.

I ask you to take the book you now have in your hand; do not give it away, but show it and this newsletter to at least 5–10 people you know or meet. Show them the price list and order

form in the back of the book. You will see how interested people will be in this beautiful book at these low prices.

You may be surprised at your ability to be an apostle and spread the love of God. You may also order more booklists and newsletters from me for your Christmas card list and friends.

I have a very dear friend who once told me he used to buy books at $2.00 each and give them to his non-Catholic friends. Many became Catholics. But, he had to stop this because these books now cost $10.00 each and he could not afford to give them away anymore.

With this in mind, we have made it possible for this book (which would normally cost $10.00) to be sold in quantities for $2.00 each. Even the poor will be able to afford this book. Also, our non-Catholic friends will enjoy it.

I am asking you to help me with this project. Many have already begun to help me. One layman from a midwest town started with $2.00 copies (in quantity) of another book by St. Alphonsus, *The Glories of Mary*. He showed one copy to three priests. One priest bought 300 copies, the other 100 copies, and the last 25 copies for their parishes, as well as for themselves to meditate on for their sermons. The man then ordered 200 copies which his children sold after Mass for $2.00 each. The next week he sold 500 copies. He is now working on his new order of 1,000 books. He also ordered 500 copies of another book, THE PASSION AND DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST by St. Alphonsus. An unemployed steel worker just ordered 400 copies to sell and give away in the Pittsburg area.

You can do the same with THE PASSION AND DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST, THE GLORIES OF MARY, THE INCARNATION BIRTH AND INFANCY OF JESUS CHRIST, THE HOLY EUCHARIST, and VICTORIES OF THE MARTYRS, DIGNITY AND DUTIES OF THE PRIEST, THE TRUE SPOUSE OF JESUS CHRIST, THE WAY OF SALVATION AND OF PERFECTION and PREPARATION FOR DEATH. You could sell the books at slightly

above your cost, in order to be able to afford to give some copies away free.

Order 50 copies for $108 to start with. Sell them to your Rosary groups, CCD classes, Blue Army, Legion of Mary, Knights of Columbus, schools, Third Order, Padre Pio prayer groups, adoration societies, and other Sacred Scripture and prayer groups. Offer copies to your libraries, schools and Church book racks. Ask your local bookstore to sell the book. See our prices in the back of the book.

If you can help me sell half of these 70,000 books, I will be able to reprint it and other books by St. Alphonsus. We have given more than 175,000 books to the poor in the Philippine Islands and thousands to the English speaking countries of Africa. This is being done through the respective countries' hierarchies.

We would also like to send these books to India, Ceylon, Pakistan and other English-speaking African countries. You can help me accomplish this and make this a beautiful project for Christ, our Mother Mary, and the poor of the world. In the process, you will help yourself and your loved ones.

I thank you, especially, for all the help you have given me to accomplish this work of printing which is so important for the world. Without your continued support for our printing, we will not be able to help you and the poor of the world to know and love Christ and Our Blessed Mother better.

You are the means Christ will use to make Himself and His Mother more loved. Your reward will be great in Heaven!

Together in Christ through Mary,

O.B.L. Victory Mission Inc.

PREFACE

TO

THE CENTENARY EDITION

OF

THE WORKS OF ST. ALPHONSUS.

THE present volume is the first of a new and only complete edition in English of the ascetical and dogmatical works of Saint Alphonsus de Liguori. The works of the Saint, relating to Moral Theology and written by him in Latin, will remain untranslated. In regard to the arrangement of matter, this English edition is based on the French translation, from the Italian, published in twenty-seven volumes, of Fathers Leopold Dujardin and Jules Jacques, of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer. It will contain many of the explanatory notes with which their translation is enriched. These notes will enable the reader to understand more fully the writings of the holy Doctor. It was usual with the saintly author to insert in his works Latin Scripture texts and Latin quotations from the Fathers. This method, which has been adopted in the published German and French translations, is also followed in this new English edition. The Latin texts will, however, be given as foot-notes. The sacred poetry composed by Saint Alphonsus will be found interspersed through the different volumes of the ascetical works. The editor

has availed himself of the few works already translated into English by the late Bishop Coffin, C.SS.R., and by others. But whatever he has used he has thoroughly revised and made to conform to the general plan of the present publication. Besides the table of contents, each volume will contain an alphabetical index. This new and complete edition bears the name of "The Centenary Edition," in commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the death of Saint Alphonsus, occurring in the year 1887.

In regard to the value and merits of the writings of Saint Alphonsus, the editor believes that it will prove interesting to insert here the sanctions and approbations conferred upon them by the sovereign Pontiffs.

The learned Pope Benedict XIV. approved very highly of the writings of the Saint, and in a letter addressed to him in regard to his Moral Theology, expressed the belief that his work would prove most welcome and useful to the whole Christian world.

Clement XIV. entertained the highest esteem for the Saint. This was the Pope at whose death Saint Alphonsus assisted in so wonderful a manner.

Pius VII. wished to possess as relics the three fingers of the right hand with which the Saint had written his works and defended the honor of God, of the Blessed Virgin, and of our holy religion. He also confirmed the judgment pronounced, May 3, 1803, by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, that in the printed as well as unprinted works of Saint Alphonsus there is nothing that deserves censure. A second decree of the same Congretion, of the year 1815, met also with his approbation. In this decree we read these words: "The omnipotent word of God that calls the stars that they should shine in the firmament of the Church militant, has also called his Venerable Servant Alphonsus Liguori that he should shine by the light of apostolic virtues. He was obedient

to the call, and like the sun that sends its rays everywhere, he has sent forth rays of virtues, worthy of an apostle, when he contemned the honors of the world or showed by his voice and his writings, the road of justice to those who were wandering about in the dark night of this world, that they might be able to pass from the power of darkness into the light and the kingdom of God; or when he gave the best rules to his disciples whom he called members of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer; or when, as Bishop, he united fortitude to meekness, and adorned his crown with the ornaments of the other virtues like so many heavenly jewels. To adjudge to so great and illustrious a man the honor of the saints, may be regarded in these days a joyful event for the Church, because the faithful may learn therefrom that though the times and years do indeed change and pass away, yet the Church of Christ cannot change nor perish; that the spirit of our holy Fathers has not become extinct; and that the Spouse of Christ never grows old, but amid the perishableness and changeableness of the years is ever blooming in continual youth and beauty. Thence, all those who have the care of souls, and all those who preach the word of God, may learn how very much of that which is noble and salutary in Alphonsus Mary de Liguori they may imitate."

The finest eulogy of Saint Alphonsus was, however, pronounced by Pius VII. in his Bull of Beatification, September 6, 1816. He says: "Alphonsus was in God's hands a sharp arrow, which, discharged against vice, strikes now in one place, now in another, in order to promote the honor of God and the salvation of souls. As a sharp arrow, heated by the fire of love, he has wounded the hearts of not a few priests, and so inflamed them that they also left all things and followed their Redeemer. Thus he established the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, whose priests have the special duty to preach

to the people living scattered in the country. One cannot wonder enough how many enmities he has removed, how many wandering sinners he has led back to the right road and to Christian perfection, by word and example, and by his *numerous writings*. Besides, he was so devoted a client of the Mother of God, that it was always a pleasure to him to praise this sublime Mother and Virgin, and to write about her glories books filled with holy learning. (This is beautiful praise of his book *The Glories of Mary*.) Bowed down physically by age, labor, and very grievous illness, yet mentally strong and ardent, he never ceased to speak and to write about heavenly things till his ninetieth year, when full of joy, he died a saintly death."

Pope Leo XII., in a Brief dated February 19, 1825, addressed to Signor Marietti of Turin, approving of his complete edition of the works of Saint Alphonsus, classes the saint among the number of pious and learned writers raised up by Divine Providence to stem the torrent of bad publications which at that time was rushing down on society, and says of him, "that he is pre-eminent for a most tender piety and devotion, and for a singular zeal with which in his writings he urges the frequentation of the Sacraments, and inculcates the love of Jesus Christ, and confidence in His merits and mercy, together with devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, and to the saints, which are indeed the surest bulwarks against every kind of demoralization." And of Signor Marietti himself His Holiness says, "that in collecting and publishing the works of such a writer he had deserved well, not only of religion, but, if it did but know its own real good, of society in general."

Pope Pius VIII., when as Cardinal Castiglione he held the office of *Pœnitentiarius Major*, exhibited on different occasions his great affection for Saint Alphonsus. For example, he congratulates the Bishop of Marseilles

because he promoted among the faithful a veneration for the Saint, "who not only in our day has adorned the august episcopate with the lustre of his virtues, but has made it resplendent by a doctrine that is sound and according to God (*sana ac secundum Deum*), and who has written so many books in which, according to the laudable judgment (of the Holy See), nothing is contained worthy of censure." In another letter he expresses his joy that the veneration of Saint Alphonsus is extending more and more every day. For "Saint Liguori was conspicuous by the light of all the virtues that can be imitated by the clergy, and his writings are a pure fountain (*fons purus*), from which one may draw sacred science without endangering the piety of faith, as Saint Jerome expresses himself."

Gregory XVI., of holy memory, loved to praise the profound learning and eminent sanctity of Saint Alphonsus. He placed his name in the ecclesiastical calendar, and extended his Mass and office to the universal Church. "He is resplendent," said the great Pope, "even among the brilliant lights that adorn the Catholic Church. It was under Pope Gregory XVI. that the decision was given by the *Sacra Pœnitentiaria* that, according to the words, *Nihil censura dignum repertum est*—there is nothing found worthy of censure,—the opinions of Saint Alphonsus may be followed in the pulpit as well as in the confessional, even if one has not maturely examined the reasons upon which the opinions are founded, provided only that one does not regard it as a reproach to those who follow the opinions of other approved authors. This decision induced the Cardinal Archbishop of Besançon, Rohan-Chabot, earnestly to exhort his clergy to adhere to the practice of Saint Alphonsus, in order that uniformity might be attained.

Pope Pius IX., in a letter to the Rev. Father Hugues, of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, dated

November 25, 1846, is pleased to express his joy and consolation on hearing that the German edition of the works of Saint Alphonsus had met with so great success, "at a moment, too, when by the insidious devices of the enemies of religion so many pestilential books are in circulation on every side, to corrupt and deprave the minds and morals especially of those not on their guard against them." "Wherefore," His Holiness continues, "we greatly commend your pious undertaking, and we encourage you to continue with still greater diligence in endeavoring to spread the most wholesome writings of Saint Alphonsus every day more and more. To read them cannot but be of the greatest advantage, not only to Christians in general, but also to ecclesiastics, and to those especially who have the care and the direction of souls. For the works of that most holy and most learned man, written with an extraordinary tenderness of piety and devotion, breathe in every page a special love for Jesus Christ, and confidence in His merits and mercy; they inspire the highest devotion to the Virgin Mother of God and to the saints; they inflame men's hearts with the desire of frequenting the most holy Sacraments, and furnish a most copious supply of excellent admonitions, counsels, and injunctions for procuring and carrying on the work of the salvation of souls."

It was Pope Pius IX. who graciously responded to the petition of many Cardinals, Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, and other dignitaries, by declaring Saint Alphonsus a Doctor of the Church—a distinction that had not been conferred on any ecclesiastical writer or theologian for six centuries. The following is a translation of the decree which placed the name of Saint Alphonsus in the category of the Doctors of the Church:

"Among those who have done and taught, and whom our Lord Jesus Christ has declared should be great in the kingdom of heaven, is rightly counted Saint Alphonsus Maria di Liguori,

Founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, and Bishop of Saint Agatha of the Goths. He shone as a watch-light on its tower, giving examples of all virtues to those who follow Christ and are of the household of God. Already, because of the brightness of his light, he has been reckoned among the Saints, the domestics of God. But what he reduced to practice in his holy life, he taught also in word and by writing. He stands distinguished for exposing and destroying the lurking-places of unbelievers and Jansenists, so widely spread about. And, over and beyond this, he has cleared up questions that were clouded; he has solved what was doubtful, making a safe path, through which the directors of Christian souls may tread with foot unhurt, between the involved opinions of theologians, whether too loose or too rigorous.

"And besides this, he has signally cast light on the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception, and of the Infallibility of the Sovereign Pontiff teaching *ex cathedrâ;* and he strenuously taught these doctrines, which in our day have been defined as of faith.

"He has, finally, made clear dark passages of the Holy Scriptures, both in his ascetic writings, which are freighted with a celestial odor, and in a most salutary commentary, in which, for the nourishment of piety and the instruction of the soul, he has given expositions of the Psalms, as well as of the hymns recited in the Divine Office, for the benefit especially of those obliged to its recitation.

"Pius VII., of holy memory, was greatly moved by the exceeding wisdom of Alphonsus, and spoke in his praise as follows: 'In the dark night of the world, he has shown by his voice and his writings the road of justice to the wandering, by which they may pass from the power of darkness to the light and kingdom of God.'

"Nor were less remarkable words used by Pope Gregory XVI., of holy memory, when he raised, by decretal letters, Saint Alphonsus to the honors of canonization. Pope Gregory XVI. said that there were in the writings of the Blessed Alphonsus 'a wonderful force, an abundance and variety of doctrine.' But in our days the 'nations declare his wisdom, and the Church shows forth his praise.' So that very many cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, almost all the prelates of the whole Catholic uni-

verse, the generals of religious orders, the theological faculties of the most celebrated universities, illustrious chapters of canons and learned men of every ecclesiastical body, have presented petitions to our Holy Father Pius IX., Supreme Pontiff, in which they express their common desires that Saint Alphonsus Maria di Liguori may be adorned with the title and the honors of *Doctor of the Church*. His Holiness, graciously accepting these prayers, committed to the Congregation of Rites, according to custom in matters of this kind, the examining of so very grave a question. Consequently, in ordinary meetings held at the Vatican on the day below mentioned, hearing the Most Eminent and Reverend Cardinal Constantine Patrizi, Dean of the Sacred College, Prefect of the said Congregation, and reporter of the Cause; full attention having been given to the animadversions of the Rev. Father D. Peter Minetti, Promoter of the Holy Faith, with the answers of the Promoter of the Cause; and also the opinions of the theologians not engaged in the Cause (*pro veritate*); and finally, all relating to the matter on the one side and the other having been most severely weighed, the Most Eminent and the Most Reverend Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Rites have judged by unanimous consent that it should be answered:

"To give counsel to His Holiness in favor of the granting or declaration, and extension to the whole Church, of the title of *Doctor*, in honor of Saint Alphonsus Maria di Liguori, with special Office and Mass, the *Credo;* the antiphon *O Doctor* at the *Magnificat* of the First and Second Vespers; the *Sapientiam* (from the Common of Doctors) for the lessons of the First Nocturn; and the *In medio Ecclesiæ*, for the Responsory of the Eighth Lesson. Dated March 2, 1871.

"Afterwards, a faithful account having been made of all and singular of the above, to our Most Holy Lord Pope Pius IX., by the undersigned Secretary of the said Congregation, His Holiness approved and confirmed the rescript, and of his supreme authority ordered that a General Decree, *urbis et orbis*, should be sent forth, on the twenty-third day of the same month and year.

"CONSTANTINE, CARD. PATRIZI,
"*Bishop of Ostia and Velletri, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.*
[L. S.] "D. BARTOLINI, *Secretary of S. C. R.*"

The editor wishes to add one more testimony in regard to the value and the merits of the works of Saint Alphonsus. In a letter of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII. addressed to Fathers Dujardin and Jules Jacques, priests of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, we read as follows:

"Beloved Sons: Health and Apostolic Benediction:

"Although the writings of the holy Doctor Alphonsus Maria de Liguori have already been spread throughout the world, not without very great profit to the Christian religion, yet it is desirable that they be propagated more and more, and be found in the hands of all. For he very well knew how to adapt Catholic truths to the comprehension of all, to provide for the moral direction of souls, to excite in a wonderful way true piety in the hearts of all, and 'to show to those who wander in the dark night of the world the road by which they may pass from the power of darkness to the light and to the kingdom of God' (Decree of December 21, 1815). And assuredly he has protected by the most solid reasons divine revelation against the attacks of the Deists; he has defended with zeal the truths of our faith; he has very efficaciously maintained the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God; he has fought very energetically in behalf of the primacy and infallible authority of the Roman Pontiff; with as much learning as piety he has thrown light upon the designs of Divine Providence in the work of saving man through Jesus Christ; he has written commentaries on the Psalms and Canticles in a manner best adapted to nourish the piety of the clergy; he has shown the glory of the Church in the victories of the martyrs; in a history of heresies and a dogmatical work he has vigorously refuted all heresies, but has chiefly overthrown Jansenism and Febronianism, the errors of which had already spread, carrying with them the germs of so many monstrous opinions that

to-day shake the foundations of religious and civil society, and which he himself attacked with such perspicacity that most of the propositions condemned in the *Syllabus* a century after are expressly refuted by his writings. 'One might even truly say that there is no error in our time that has not been refuted, at least for the greater part, by Saint Alphonsus' (Apostolic Brief, July 7, 1871). And without speaking of the Moral Theology, which is everywhere held in the highest esteem, and which offers to directors of souls a perfectly sure rule of conduct, he has by means of numerous learned ascetical works enkindled, as it were, by burning coals, nourished and augmented languishing love principally toward our Lord Jesus Christ and His sweetest Mother, for whom, to the great advantage of the people, he knew how to inflame the coldest hearts. And, 'what is above all worthy of remark, though he wrote so many things, it must be acknowledged that, after an attentive examination, these writings may be read by the faithful without the least danger to their faith' (Bull of May 26, 1839, n. 7). We therefore congratulate you, Beloved Sons, that you have translated into French all the dogmatical and ascetical writings that are published, either in Latin or in Italian, by your very holy and very learned Father; first, because the French language, being known nearly to all peoples, can extend more the fruits of the works of the eminent Doctor; and, secondly, because it is to you in preference to others that has been intrusted this difficult task,—you, who otherwise should have written about the character, the learning, and the holiness of these same writings, and who, as sons, could more easily and more perfectly acquire the spirit of your Father. Moreover, we congratulate ourselves because of your undertaking in this, that the holy author often glories in his writings that he has followed the doctrine of the Angel of the schools. Such deference of the new Doctor of

the Church in regard to the latter is a new eulogy and a new glory of the doctrine of St. Thomas. Hence follows a recommendation of great weight in favor of the restoration of Christian philosophy, which, by our recent encyclical letter, we have so strenuously urged that it should be carried into effect according to the spirit of the angelic Doctor. We therefore bespeak for this new publication of the works of Saint Alphonsus a very great success, corresponding to our and your desires; and in this expectation as an omen of celestial favor, we grant most affectionately, Beloved Sons, to you and to the whole Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Apostolic Benediction as a mark of our paternal benevolence.

"Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, August 8th, 1879, the second year of our Pontificate.

"LEO XIII., POPE."

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It was towards the year 1758, at the age of sixty-two, after more than thirty years of apostolic labor, that St. Alphonsus published this excellent work, which has converted and sanctified so many souls.

In the order of the ascetical works the PREPARATION FOR DEATH is put, not without reason, in the first place. It is death that predominates in some way over our life on earth; it should also predominate over our thoughts and our whole conduct. Man, the Christian, begins to live well only when he prepares himself to die well. This method is precisely that which is followed in the exercises of spiritual retreats and of the missions during which we begin to meditate on the Last Things of man, in order to enter at first what we call the Purgative Way. This is also the order that our Author has followed in the Considerations that compose the present work.—ED.

To Mary Immaculate

AND

Ever Virgin,

TO HER WHO IS FULL OF GRACE, AND BLESSED AMONG ALL THE CHILDREN OF ADAM:

TO THE DOVE, THE TURTLE, THE BELOVED OF GOD:

HONOR OF THE HUMAN RACE, DELIGHT OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY:

HOUSE OF LOVE, EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY:

MIRROR OF ALL VIRTUES:

MOTHER OF FAIR LOVE, MOTHER OF HOLY HOPE, AND MOTHER OF MERCY:

ADVOCATE OF THE MISERABLE, DEFENCE OF THE WEAK, LIGHT OF THE BLIND, PHYSICIAN OF THE SICK:

GATE OF HEAVEN:

ANCHOR OF CONFIDENCE, CITY OF REFUGE, ARK OF LIFE, RAINBOW OF PEACE, HAVEN OF SALVATION:

STAR OF THE SEA, AND SEA OF SWEETNESS:

ADVOCATE OF SINNERS, HOPE OF THOSE WHO ARE IN DESPAIR, HELP OF THE ABANDONED:

COMFORTER OF THE AFFLICTED, CONSOLATION OF THE DYING, AND JOY OF THE WORLD:

HER AFFECTIONATE AND LOVING, THOUGH VILE AND UNWORTHY SERVANT, HUMBLY DEDICATES THIS WORK.

THE AUTHOR'S PROTEST.

In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII., I declare that I have no intention of attributing any other than a purely human authority to the miracles, revelations, favors, and particular cases recorded in this book; and the same as regards the titles of Saints and Blessed, applied to servants of God not yet canonized, except in those cases which have been confirmed by the Holy Roman Catholic Church and the Apostolic See, of which I declare myself to be an obedient son; and therefore I submit myself and all that I have written in this book to her judgment.

AIM OF THE WORK.

(THIS SHOULD BE READ.)

Some persons asked me to write a book on the Eternal Maxims, for the use of those who desire to establish themselves in virtue and to advance in a spiritual life. Others requested me to prepare a collection of matter for the sermons of the missions and of the spiritual exercises. Not to multiply books, labor, and expense, I resolved to compose the work in the present form, with the hope that it might answer both purposes. To render it useful as a book of meditations for seculars, I have divided the considerations into three points. Each point will serve for one meditation, and therefore I have annexed to each point affections and prayers. I entreat my readers not to grow weary, if, in those prayers, they always find petitions for the grace of perseverance and of divine love. For us, these are the two graces most necessary for the attainment of eternal salvation.

The grace of divine love is, according to St. Francis de Sales, the grace which contains in itself all graces: because the virtue of charity toward God brings with it all other virtues. *Now all good things come to me together with her.*[1] He who loves God is humble, chaste, obedient, and mortified; in a word, he possesses all virtues. "Love," says St. Augustine, "and do what you wish."[2] They who love God labor to avoid whatever is offensive to him, and seek to please him in all things.

[1] "Venerunt autem mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa."—*Wisd.* vii. 11.

[2] Ama, et fac quod vis.

The grace of perseverance is that grace by which we obtain the eternal crown. St. Bernard says that Paradise is promised to those who begin a good life, but is only given to those who persevere. "To beginners a reward is promised, but to him who perseveres it is given."[1] But this gift of perseverance is, as the Fathers teach, given only to those who ask it. Hence St. Thomas asserts that to enter heaven continual prayer is necessary.[2] And our Redeemer said: *We ought always to pray, and not to faint.*[3] It is because they do not pray for the gift of perseverance that so many miserable sinners, after having obtained pardon, lose again the grace of God. Their sins are forgiven; but because they afterward neglect to ask of God the grace of perseverance, particularly in the time of temptations, they relapse into sin. And although the grace of final perseverance is altogether gratuitous, and cannot be merited by good works; still Suarez teaches that it can be infallibly obtained by prayer: and according to St. Augustine, it may be merited by humble supplication.[4]

This necessity of prayer I have demonstrated at length in another little work, entitled *The Great Means of Prayer*. This book, though small, has cost me a great deal of labor. I consider it to be of extreme utility to all sorts of persons; and I unhesitatingly assert that, among all spiritual treatises, there is none, and there can be none, more necessary than that which treats on prayer as a means of obtaining eternal salvation.

To render these considerations useful to preachers who

[1] Inchoantibus præmium promittitur, sed perseverantibus datur.—*De modo bene viv.* s. 6.

[2] "Post baptismum autem, necessaria est homini jugis oratio, ad hoc quod cœlum introeat"—P. 3. 9. 39. a. 5.

[3] "Oportet semper orare et non deficere."—*Luke*, xiii. 1.

[4] "Hoc Dei donum suppliciter emereri potest."—*De Dono persev.* c. 6.

have but few books or little time for reading, I have furnished these considerations with texts of Scripture and passages from the Fathers, which are short, but strong and animated, as they ought to be in sermons. The three points of each consideration will supply matter for one sermon. I have endeavored to collect from many authors the sentiments which appeared to me best suited to move the will, and have inserted several of them expressed briefly, that the reader may select and extend at pleasure those that please him most. May all tend to the glory of God!

I pray my reader to recommend me to Jesus Christ, whether I am living or dead; and I promise to do the same for all those who perform this act of charity toward me. Live Jesus, our love, and Mary, our hope!

PREPARATION FOR DEATH;

OR,

Considerations on the Eternal Truths.

USEFUL TO ALL AS MEDITATIONS, AND SERVICEABLE TO PRIESTS FOR SERMONS.

CONSIDERATION I.

Portrait of a Man who has recently gone into the Other World.

"Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."—*Gen.* iii. 19.

FIRST POINT.

The Body on the Death-bed.

CONSIDER that you are dust, and that you shall return to dust. A day will come when you shall die, and rot in a grave, where *worms shall be your covering*.[1] The same lot awaits all, the nobleman and the peasant, the prince and the vassal. The moment the soul leaves the body, it shall go to eternity, and the body shall return to dust. *Thou shalt send forth their breath, and they shall fail and shall return to their dust.*[2]

Imagine that you behold a person who has just expired. Look at that body still laid on the bed, the head fallen on the chest, the hair in disorder and still bathed in the sweat of death, the eyes sunk, the cheeks hollow,

1 "Operimentum tuum erunt vermes."—*Isai.* xiv. 11.

2 "Auferes spiritum eorum, et deficient, et in pulverem suum revertentur."—*Ps.* ciii. 29.

the face the color of ashes, the lips and tongue like iron, the body cold and heavy. The beholders grow pale and tremble. How many, at the sight of a deceased relative or friend, have changed their life and retired from the world!

Still greater horror will be excited when the body begins to putrefy. Twenty-four hours have not elapsed since the death of that young man, and his body has already begun to exhale an offensive smell. The windows must be opened; a great quantity of incense must be used; and, to prevent the communication of disease to the entire family, he must soon be transferred to the church, and buried in the earth. "If he has been one of the rich or nobles of the earth, his body shall send forth a more intolerable stench,"[1] says Saint Ambrose.

Behold the end of that proud, of that lewd and voluptuous man! Before death desired and sought after in conversations, now become an object of horror and disgust to all who behold him. His relatives are in haste to remove him from the house; they hire men to shut him up in a coffin, to carry him to the church-yard and throw him into a grave. During life, the fame of his wit, of his politeness, of the elegance of his manners, and of his facetiousness, was spread abroad; but after death he is soon forgotten. *Their memory hath perished with a noise.*[2]

On hearing the news of his death, some say, He was an honor to his family; others say, He has provided well for his children. Some regret his death because he had done them some service during life; others rejoice at it because it is an advantage to them. But in a little time no one speaks of him. In the beginning, his nearest relatives feel unwilling to hear his name, through fear of renewing their grief. In the visits of condolence,

[1] "Gravius fœtent divitum corpora." In Hexamer. l. 6, c. 8.

[2] "Periit memoria eorum cum sonitu."—*Ps.* ix. 7.

all are careful to make no mention of the deceased; and should any happen to speak of him, the relatives exclaim, For God's sake, do not mention his name!

Consider that as you have acted on the occasion of the death of friends and relatives, so others will act on the occasion of your death. The living take part in the scene. They occupy the possessions and offices of the deceased; but the dead are no longer remembered—their name is scarcely ever mentioned. In the beginning, their relatives are afflicted for a short time; but they will soon be consoled by the share of the property of the deceased which falls to them.

Thus in a short time your death will be rather a source of joy; and in the very room in which you have breathed forth your soul, and in which you have been judged by Jesus Christ, others will dance, and eat, and play, and laugh as before. And where will your soul then be?

Affections and Prayers.

O Jesus, my Redeemer! I thank Thee for not having taken me out of life when I was Thy enemy. For how many years have I deserved to be in hell! Had I died on such a day or such a night, what should be my lot for all eternity? Lord, I thank Thee; I accept my death in satisfaction for my sins, and I accept it in the manner in which Thou shalt be pleased to send it. But since Thou hast borne with me until now, wait for me a little longer. *Suffer me, therefore, that I may lament my sorrow a little!*[1] Give me time to bewail, before Thou judgest me, the offences I have offered to Thee. I will no longer resist Thy calls. Who knows but the words which I have just read may be the last call for me? I acknowledge that I am unworthy of mercy. Thou hast so often pardoned me, and I have ungratefully offended Thee again. *A contrite and humble heart, O God! Thou wilt not despise.*[2] Since, O Lord,

[1] "Dimitte ergo me, ut plangam paululum dolorem meum."—*Job* x. 20.

[2] "Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies."—*Ps.* l. 19.

Thou knowest not how to despise a contrite and humble heart, behold the penitent traitor who has recourse to Thee. For Thy mercy's sake, cast me not away from Thy face. Thou hast said: *Him that cometh to me I will not cast out.*[1] It is true that I have outraged Thee more than others, because I have been favored more than others with Thy lights and graces. But the blood Thou hast shed for me encourages me, and offers me pardon if I repent. My Sovereign Good! I am sorry with my whole soul for having insulted Thee. Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee for the future. I have offended Thee sufficiently. The remainder of my life I wish to spend, not in offending Thee, but only in weeping unceasingly over the insults I have offered to Thee, and in loving with my whole heart a God worthy of infinite love. O Mary, my hope! pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

The Body in the Grave.

But, Christian soul, that you may see more clearly what you are, follow the advice of St. Chrysostom: "Go to the grave; contemplate dust, ashes, worms; and sigh."[2] Behold how that corpse first turns yellow, and then black. Afterwards, the entire body is covered with a white, disgusting mould; then comes forth a clammy, fetid slime, which flows to the earth. In that putrid mass is generated a great multitude of worms, which feed on the flesh. Rats come to feast on the body; some attack it on the outside; others enter into the mouth and bowels. The cheeks, the lips, and the hair fall off. The ribs are first laid bare, and then the arms and legs. The worms, after having consumed all the flesh, devour one another; and, in the end, nothing remains but a fetid skeleton, which in the course of time falls to pieces; the bones

[1] "Eum qui venit ad me non ejiciam foras."—*John* vi. 37.

[2] "Perge ad sepulchrum, contemplare pulverem, cineres, vermes, et suspira."—*Ad Theod.* paræn. 1.

separate from one another and the head separates from the body. *They became like the chaff of a summer's threshing-floor, and they were carried away by the wind.*[1] Behold what man is: he is a little dust on the threshing-floor, which is blown away by the wind.

Behold a young nobleman, who was called the life and soul of conversation: where is he now? Enter into his apartment: he is no longer there. If you look for his bed, his robes, or his armor, you will find that they have passed into the hands of others. If you wish to see him, turn to the grave, where he is changed into corruption and withered bones. O God! that body, pampered with so many delicacies, clothed with so much pomp, and attended by so many servants, to what is it now reduced? O ye saints! who knew how to mortify your bodies for the love of that God whom alone you loved on this earth, you well understood the end of all human greatness, of all earthly delights; now your bones are honored as sacred relics, and preserved in shrines of gold, and your souls are happy in the enjoyment of God, expecting the last day, on which your bodies shall be made partners of your glory, as they have been partakers of your cross in this life. The true love for the body consists in treating it here with rigor and contempt, that it may be happy for eternity; and in refusing it all pleasures, which might make it miserable forever.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, then, O my God! to what my body, by which I have so much offended Thee, must be reduced! to worms and rottenness. This does not afflict me; on the contrary, I rejoice that this flesh of mine, which has made me lose Thee, my Sovereign Good, will one day rot and be consumed. What grieves me is, that, to indulge in these wretched pleasures, I have given so

[1] "Redacta quasi in favillam æstivæ areæ, quæ rapta sunt vento."—ii. 35.

much displeasure to Thee. But I will not despair of Thy mercy. Thou hast waited for me in order to pardon me. *The Lord waiteth, that He may have mercy on you.*[1] Thou wilt forgive me if I repent. O Infinite Goodness, I repent with my whole heart of having despised Thee. I will say with St. Catharine of Genoa, "My Jesus, no more sins! no more sins!" I will no longer abuse Thy patience. O my crucified Love, I will not wait till the confessor places the crucifix in my hands at the hour of death. From this moment I embrace Thee; from this moment I recommend my soul to Thee. *Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.*[2] My soul has been so many years in the world, and has not loved Thee. Give me light and strength to love Thee during the remainder of my life. I will not wait to love Thee at the hour of death. From this moment I love Thee; I embrace Thee, and unite myself to Thee; and I promise never more to depart from Thee. O most holy Virgin! bind me to Jesus Christ, and obtain for me the grace never to lose him more.

THIRD POINT.

Let us Labor to Save our Souls.

My brother, in this picture of death behold yourself and what you must one day become. "Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." Consider that in a few years, and perhaps in a few months or days, you will become rottenness and worms. By this thought Job became a saint. *I have said to rottenness: Thou art my father: to worms, my mother, and my sister.*[3]

All must end; and if, after death, you lose your soul all will be lost for you. Consider yourself already dead, says St. Laurence Justinian, since you know that you

[1] "Expectat Deus, ut misereatur vestri."—*Isa.* xxx. 18.

[2] "In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum."—*Ps.* xxx. 6.

[3] "Putredini dixi: Pater meus es;—Mater mea, et soror mea, vermibus."—*Job*, xvii. 14.

must necessarily die.[1] If you were already dead, what would you not desire to have done? Now that you have life, reflect that you will one day be among the dead. St. Bonaventure says, that, to guide the vessel safely, the pilot must remain at the helm; and in like manner, to lead a good life, a man should always imagine himself at the hour of death. Says St. Bernard, "Look to the sins of your youth, and be covered with shame."[2] "Remember the sins of manhood and weep."[3] Look to the present disorders of your life; tremble,[4] and hasten to apply a remedy.

When St. Camillus de Lellis saw the graves of the dead, he said within himself: If these return to life, what would they not do for eternal glory? And what do I do for my soul, who have time? This the saint said through humility. But my brother, you, perhaps, have reason to fear that you are the fruitless fig-tree of which the Lord said: *Behold, for these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and I find none.*[5] You have been in this world for more than three years; what fruit have you produced? Remember, says St. Bernard, that the Lord seeks not only flowers, but fruits; that is, not only good desires and resolutions, but also holy works. Learn then to profit of the time which God in his mercy gives you: do not wait until you desire time to do good, when time shall be no more. Do not wait till you are told, Time shall be no longer; depart;[6] the time for leaving this world has arrived; what is done, is done.

[1] "Considera te jam mortuum, quem scis de necessitate moriturum."—*Lign. vit. de hum.* c. 4.

[2] Vide prima, et erubesce.

[3] Vide media, et ingemisce.

[4] "Vide novissima, et contremisce."—*De Divers.* s. 12.

[5] "Ecce anni tres sunt, ex quo venio quærens fructum in ficulnea hac et non invenio."—*Luke*, xiii. 7.

[6] "Tempus non erit amplius: proficiscere."—*Apoc.* x. 6.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold me, O my God! I am that tree which deserved for so many years to hear from Thee, *Cut it down—why cumbereth it the ground?*[1] Yes; for so many years during which I have been in the world, I have brought forth no other fruit than the briers and thorns of sin. But, O Lord! Thou dost not wish that I despair. Thou hast said to all, that he who seeks Thee shall find Thee. *Seek and you shall find.*[2] I seek Thee, O my God! and wish for Thy grace. For all the offences I have offered to Thee I am sorry with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow for them. Hitherto I have fled from Thee; but now I prefer Thy friendship to the possession of all the kingdoms of the earth. I will no longer resist Thy invitations. Dost Thou wish me to be all Thine? I give Thee my whole being without reserve. Thou gavest Thyself entirely to me on the Cross. I give myself entirely to Thee.

Thou hast said: *If you shall ask me anything in my name, that I will do.*[3] My Jesus, trusting in this great promise, I ask, in Thy name and through Thy merits, Thy grace and Thy love. Grant that Thy grace and Thy holy love may abound in my soul, in which sin has abounded. I thank Thee for having given me grace to make this petition by inspiring the prayer, Thou showest that Thou dost intend to hear it. Hear me, O my Jesus; give me a great love for Thee; give me a great desire to please Thee, and give me strength to do Thy will. O Mary, my great advocate! do thou also listen to my cry, and pray to Jesus for me.

[1] "Succide ergo illam; ut quid etiam terram occupat?"—*Luke*, xiii. 7.
[2] "Quærite et invenietis."—*Matt.* vii. 7.
[3] "Si quid petieritis me in nomine meo, hoc *faciam*."—*John*, xiv. 14.

CONSIDERATION II.

With Death all Ends.

"An end is come, the end is come."—*Ezek.* vii. 6.

FIRST POINT.

Death Deprives us of Everything.

By worldlings they only are esteemed happy who enjoy the pleasures, the riches, and the pomps of this world; but death puts an end to all these earthly goods. *For what is your life? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while.*[1] The vapors exhaled from the earth, when raised in the air and clothed with light by the sun, make a splendid appearance; but how long does their splendor last? It vanishes before the first blast of the wind. Behold that nobleman: to-day he is courted, feared, and almost adored; to-morrow he is dead, despised, reviled, and trampled upon. At death we must leave all things. The brother of that great servant of God, Thomas à Kempis, took delight in speaking of a beautiful house which he had built for himself: a friend told him that it had one great defect. "What is it?" said he. "It is," answered the other, "that you have made a door in it." "What," rejoined the brother of à Kempis, "is a door a defect?" "Yes," answered the friend; "for through this door you must be one day carried dead, and must leave the house and all things."

1 "Quæ est vita vestra? vapor est ad modicum parens."—*James* iv. 15.

Death, in fine, strips man of all the goods of this world. Oh, what a spectacle to behold a prince banished from his palace, never more to return to it, and to see others take possession of his furniture, of his money, and of all his other goods! The servants leave him in the grave, with a garment scarcely sufficient to cover his body. There is no longer any one to esteem or flatter him, no longer any one to attend to his commands. Saladin, who had acquired many kingdoms in Asia, gave directions at death, that when his body should be carried to the place of burial a person should go before, holding his winding-sheet suspended from a pole, and crying aloud: "This is all that Saladin brings with him to the grave."

When the body of the prince is laid in the grave, his flesh drops off; and behold, his skeleton can no longer be distinguished from others. "Contemplate," St. Basil says, "the sepulchres of the dead, and see if you can distinguish who has been a servant, and who has been a master."[1] Diogenes was one day seen by Alexander the Great seeking with great anxiety for something among the bones of the dead. Alexander asked him what he was in search of. "I am looking," replied Diogenes, "for the head of Philip your father. I am not able to distinguish it: if you can find it, show it to me." "Men," says Seneca, "are born unequal; but after death all are equal."[2] And Horace says that death brings down the sceptre to the level of the spade.[3] In a word, when death comes, *the end comes;* all ends, we leave all things; and of all that we possess in this world, we bring nothing to the grave.

[1] "Contemplare sepulchra, vide utrum poteris discernere quis servus, quis dominus fuerit."—*Hom.* 11. *E. B. app.*

[2] Impares nascimur, pares morimur.—*Ep.* 91.

[3] Sceptra ligonibus æquat.

Affections and Prayers.

My Lord! since Thou givest me light to know that whatever the world esteems is smoke and folly, grant me strength to detach my heart from earthly goods, before death separates me from them. Miserable that I have been! How often, for the miserable pleasures and goods of this earth, have I offended and lost Thee, who art an infinite good! O my Jesus! my heavenly physician, cast Thine eyes on my poor soul, look at the many wounds which I have inflicted on it by my sins, and have pity on me. If Thou wishest Thou canst make me clean.[1] I know that Thou art able and willing to heal me; but in order to heal me, Thou wishest me to repent of the injuries which I have committed against Thee. I am sorry for them from the bottom of my heart. Heal me, then, now that it is in Thy power to heal me. *Heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.*[2] I have forgotten Thee; but Thou hast not forgotten me; and now Thou makest me feel that Thou wilt even forget the injuries I have done Thee, if I detest them. "But if the wicked do penance . . . I will not remember all his iniquities."—*Ezek.* xviii. 21. Behold, I detest my sins, I hate them above all things. Forget, then, O my Redeemer, all the displeasures I have given Thee. For the future I will lose all things, even life, rather than forfeit Thy grace. And what can all the goods of this earth profit me without Thy grace?

Ah, assist me! Thou knowest my weakness. Hell will not cease to tempt me: it already prepares a thousand attacks to make me again its slave. No, my Jesus, do not abandon me. I wish to be henceforth the slave of Thy love. Thou art my only Lord; Thou hast created and redeemed me; Thou hast loved me more than all others; Thou alone hast merited my love; Thee alone do I wish to love.

SECOND POINT.

Glory and Power on the Death-bed.

At the hour of death, Philip II., King of Spain, called his son, and throwing off his royal robe, uncovered his

[1] "Si vis, potes me mundare."—*Matt.* viii. 2.

[2] "Sana animam meam, quia peccavi tibi."—*Ps.* xl. 5.

breast, which had been eaten away by worms, and said to him: "Prince, behold how we die! see how all the grandeur of this world ends!" Theodoret has truly said that death fears not riches, nor satellites, nor sovereigns; and that from princes as well as vassals rottenness and corruption flow.[1]

Thus the dead, though they be princes, bring nothing with them to the grave: all their glory remains on the bed on which they expire. *When he shall die, he shall take nothing away, nor shall his glory descend with him.*[2]

St. Antonine relates, that after the death of Alexander the Great a certain philosopher exclaimed: "Behold! the man who yesterday trampled on the earth is now buried in the earth. Yesterday the whole earth was not sufficient for him, and now he is content with seven palms. Yesterday he led his armies through the earth, and now he is carried by a few porters to the grave." But it is better to listen to the words of God. *Why*, says the Holy Ghost, *is earth and ashes proud?*[3]—O man! do you not see that you are dust and ashes? Why are you proud? Why do you spend so many thoughts and so many years of life in seeking worldly greatness? Death will come; and then all your greatness and all your projects will be at an end. *In that day*, says David, *all their thoughts shall perish.*[4]

Oh! how much more happy was the death of St. Paul the Hermit, who lived sixty years shut up in a cave, than the death of Nero the Emperor of Rome! How much more happy was the death of St. Felix, a Capuchin lay-brother, than that of Henry the Eighth, who lived in the

[1] Nec divitias mors metuit, nec satellites, nec purpuram; putredo sequitur, et sanies defluit.—*De Prov.* s. 6.

[2] "Cum interierit, non sumet omnia; neque descendet cum eo gloria ejus"—*Ps.* xlviii. 18.

[3] "Quid superbit terra et cinis?"—*Eccles.* x. 9.

[4] "In illa die peribunt cogitationes eorum."—*Ps.* cxlv. 4.

midst of royal magnificence, but at the same time at enmity with God! But we must remember that, to secure a happy death, the saints have abandoned all things; they have left their country; they have renounced the delights and the hopes which the world held out to them, and have embraced a life of poverty and contempt. But how can worldlings, living in the midst of sins, in the midst of earthly pleasures and dangerous occasions, expect a happy death? God warns sinners that at death they shall seek and shall not find him.[1] He tells us that the hour of death shall be the time, not of mercy, but of vengeance.[2] I will repay them in due time. Reason tells us the same; for, at death, men of the world shall find their understanding weak and darkened, and their heart hardened by the bad habits which they have contracted. Their temptations will then be more violent; how can they resist at death who were almost always accustomed to yield to temptations during life, and to be conquered by them? To change their heart a most powerful grace would be then necessary. But is God obliged to give them such a grace? Have they merited such a grace by the scandalous and disorderly life which they have led? And on that last hour depends their happiness or misery for eternity. How is it possible that he who reflects on this, and believes the truths of faith, does not leave all to give himself to God, who will judge us all according to our works.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Lord! how many nights have I slept in enmity with Thee? O God! in what a miserable state was my soul during that time. It was hated by Thee, and wished to be hated by Thee. I was condemned to hell: there was nothing wanting but the execution of the sentence. But Thou, my God, hast never ceased to

[1] "Quæretis me et non invenietis."—*John*, vii. 34.

[2] "Ego retribuam in tempore."—*Deut.* xxxii. 35.

seek after me, and to invite me to pardon. But, who can assure me that Thou hast pardoned me? Must I, O my Jesus! live in this uncertainty till Thou judgest me? But the sorrow which I feel for having offended Thee, my desire to love Thee, and still more Thy Passion, O my beloved Redeemer, make me hope that Thy grace dwells in my soul. I am sorry for having offended Thee, O Sovereign Good, and I love Thee above all things. I resolve to forfeit everything rather than lose Thy grace and Thy love. Thou wishest that the heart which seeks Thee should be full of joy. *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*[1] Lord, I detest all the injuries I have offered to Thee. Give me courage and confidence: do not upbraid me with my ingratitude; for I myself know and detest it. Thou hast said that Thou wilt not the death of a sinner, but that he be converted and live.[2] Yes, my God, I leave all things and turn to Thee. I seek Thee, I desire Thee, I love Thee above all things. Give me Thy love; I ask nothing else. O Mary, thou, after Jesus, art my hope; obtain for me holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

Let us Hasten to Give Ourselves to God.

David calls the happiness of this life a dream of one who awakes from sleep.[3] In explaining these words, a certain author says: The goods of this world appear great, but they are nothing: like a dream, which lasts but a little, and afterward vanishes, they are enjoyed but a short time.[4] The thought, that with death all ends, made St. Francis Borgia resolve to give himself entirely to God. The saint was obliged to accompany the dead body of the Empress Isabella to Grenada. When the coffin was opened, her appearance was so horrible and the smell

[1] "Lætetur cor quærentium Dominum."—1 *Par.* xvi. 10.

[2] "Nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur . . . et vivat."—*Ezek.* xxxiii. 11.

[3] "Velut somnium surgentium."—*Ps.* lxxii. 20.

[4] Somnium, quia sopitis sensibus res magnæ apparent; et non sunt, et cito avolant.

so intolerable that all ran away. But St. Francis remained to contemplate in the dead body of his sovereign the vanity of the world; and looking at it, he exclaimed: "Are you then my empress? Are you the queen before whom so many bent their knee in reverential awe? O Isabella, where is your majesty, your beauty gone? Thus then," he said within himself, "end the greatness and the crowns of this world. I will, therefore, henceforth serve a master who can never die." From that moment he consecrated himself to the love of Jesus crucified; and he made a vow to become a religious, should his wife die before him. This vow he afterward fulfilled by entering into the Society of Jesus.

Justly then has a person who was undeceived written on a skull these words: "Cogitanti vilescunt omnia." To him who reflects on death, everything in this world appears contemptible; he cannot love the earth. And why are there so many unhappy lovers of this world? It is because they do not think of death. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?*[1] Miserable children of Adam, says the Holy Ghost, why do you not chase away from your heart so many earthly affections, which make you love vanity and lies? What has happened to your forefathers must befall you. They have dwelt in the same palace which you inhabit, and have slept in your very bed; but now they are no more. Such, too, will be your lot.

My brother, give yourself then to God before death comes upon you. *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly.*[2] What you can do to-day, defer not till to-morrow; for a day once passed never returns, and to-morrow death may come, and prevent you from ever

[1] "Filii hominum, usquequo gravi corde? ut quid diligitis vanitatem et quæritis mendacium?"—*Ps.* iv. 3.

[2] "Quodcunque facere potest manus tua instanter operare."—*Eccles.* ix. 10.

more being able to do good. Detach yourself instantly from everything which removes, or can remove, you from God. Let us instantly renounce in affection the goods of this earth, before death strips us of them by force. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.*[1] Happy they who at death are already dead to all attachment to this world. They fear not, but desire death, and embrace it with joy; for, instead of separating them from the good which they love, it unites them to the Supreme Good, who is the sole object of their affections, and who will render them happy for eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer, I thank Thee for having waited for me. What should have become of me had I died when I was at a distance from Thee? May Thy mercy and patience, which I have experienced for so many years, be forever blessed! I thank Thee for the light and grace with which Thou dost now assist me. I did not then love Thee, and I cared but little to be loved by Thee. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and nothing grieves me so much as the thought of having displeased so good a God. This sorrow tortures my soul; but it is a sweet torment, because it gives me confidence that Thou hast already pardoned me. O my sweet Saviour, would that I had died a thousand times before I sinned against Thee! I tremble lest I should hereafter offend Thee again. Ah! make me die the most painful of all deaths, rather than permit me evermore to lose Thy grace. I have been once the slave of hell; but now I am Thy servant, O God of my soul. Thou hast said that Thou lovest those who love Thee.[2] I love Thee: then I am Thine, and Thou art mine. I may lose Thee at some future time; but the grace which I ask of Thee is, to take me out of life rather than suffer me ever to lose Thee again. Unasked, Thou hast bestowed upon me so many graces; I cannot now fear that Thou wilt not hear my prayer for the grace which I now implore. Do not permit me ever to lose Thee. Give me Thy love, and I desire nothing more. Mary, my hope! intercede for me.

[1] "Beati mortui, qui in Domino moriuntur."—*Apoc.* xiv. 13.

[2] "Ego diligentes me diligo."—*Prov.* viii. 17.

CONSIDERATION III.

Shortness of Life.

'What is your life? It is a vapor, which appeareth for a little while.'
—*James*, iv. 15.

FIRST POINT.

Death Comes Quickly.

WHAT is your life? It is like a vapor, which is dissipated by a blast of wind, and is seen no more. All know that they must die; but the delusion of many is, that they imagine death as far off as if it were never to arrive. But Job tells us that the life of man is short. *Man born of a woman, living for a short time, . . . who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed.*[1] This truth the Lord commanded Isaias to preach to the people. *Cry. . . . All flesh is grass. . . . Indeed, the people is grass. The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen.*[2] The life of man is like the life of a blade of grass; death comes, the grass is dried up: behold, life ends, and the flower of all greatness and of all worldly goods falls off.

My days, says Job, *have been swifter than a post.*[3] Death runs to meet us more swiftly than a post, and we at every moment run towards death. Every step, every breath brings us nearer to our end. "What I write," says

[1] "Homo brevi vivens tempore . . . ; quasi flos egreditur et conteritur."—*Job*, xiv. 1.

[2] "Clama. . . . Omnis caro fenum. . . . Vere fenum est populus: exsiccatum est fenum et cecidit flos."—*Isa.* xl. 6.

[3] "Dies mei velociores fuerunt cursore."—*Job*, ix. 25.

Jerome, "is so much taken away from life."[1] "During the time I write, I draw near to death." *We all die, and like the waters that return no more, we fall into the earth.* Behold how the stream flows to the sea, and the passing waters never return! Thus, my brother, your days pass by, and you approach death. Pleasures, amusements, pomps, praises, and acclamations pass away; and what remains? And only the grave remaineth for me.[2] We shall be thrown into a grave, and there we shall remain to rot, stripped of all things. At the hour of death the remembrance of the delights enjoyed, and of all the honors acquired in this life, will serve only to increase our pain and our diffidence of obtaining eternal salvation. Then the miserable worldling will say: "My house, my gardens, my fashionable furniture, my pictures, my garments, will in a little time be no longer mine, 'and only the grave remaineth for me.'"

Ah! at that hour all earthly goods are viewed only with pain by those who have had an attachment for them. And this pain will serve only to increase the danger of their eternal salvation; for we see by experience, that persons attached to the world wish at death to speak only of their sickness, of the physicians to be called to attend them, and of the remedies which may restore their health. When any one speaks of the state of the soul, they soon grow weary, and beg to be allowed repose. They complain of headache, and say that it pains them to hear any one speak. And if they sometimes answer, they are confused, and know not what to say. It often happens that the confessor gives them absolution, not because he knows that they are disposed for the sacrament, but because it is dangerous to defer

[1] "Quod scribo, de mea vita tollitur."—*Ad Hel. de morte Nep.*

[2] "Omnes morimur, et quasi aquæ dilabimur in terram, quæ non revertuntur."—2 *Kings*, xiv. 14.

[3] "Et solum mihi superest sepulchrum."—*Job*, xvii. 1.

it. Such is the death of those who think but little of death.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God and Lord of infinite majesty! I am ashamed to appear before Thee. How often have I dishonored Thee by preferring to Thy grace a sordid pleasure, a little dust, the indulgence of anger, caprice, or vanity! I adore and kiss, O my Redeemer, Thy holy wounds, which I have inflicted by my sins; but through these wounds I hope for pardon and salvation. Make me, O my Jesus! understand the great injury I have done Thee in leaving Thee, the fountain of every good, to drink putrid and poisoned waters. Of all the offences I have given Thee nothing now remains but pain, remorse of conscience, and fruits for hell. *Father, I am not worthy to be called Thy child.*[1] My Father! do not cast me off. It is true that I no longer merit the grace which would make me Thy child; but *Thou hast* died to pardon me. *Thou hast* said: *Turn ye to me, . . . and I will turn to you.*[2] I give up all that gratifies me, I renounce all the pleasures that the world can give me, and I turn to Thee. Pardon me for the sake of the blood which has been shed for me; I repent with my whole heart of all the insults I have offered to Thee. I repent, and I love Thee above all things. I am not worthy to love Thee; but Thou dost not refuse the love of a heart that has once despised Thee. Thou didst purposely abstain from taking me out of life when I was in sin, that I might love Thee. I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life, and I wish to love nothing but Thee. Assist me; give me holy perseverance, and Thy holy love. Mary, my refuge! recommend me to Jesus Christ.

SECOND POINT.

The Lighted Candle at Death.

King Ezechias said with tears: *My life is cut off as by a weaver; while I was yet beginning, he cut me off*[3] Oh, how

[1] "Pater, non sum dignus vocari filius tuus.—*Luke*, xv. 21.

[2] "Convertimini ad me . . . et convertar ad vos."—*Zach.* i. 3.

[3] "Præcisa est velut a texente vita mea: dum adhuc ordirer, succidit me."—*Isa.* xxxviii. 12.

many have been overtaken and cut off by death, while they were executing and arranging worldly projects devised with so much labor! By the light of the last candle, all things in this world, applause, diversions, pomps, and greatness vanish. Great secret of death! It makes us see what the lovers of this world do not see. The most princely fortunes, the most exalted dignities, and the most superb triumphs lose all their splendor when viewed from the bed of death. The ideas that we have formed of certain false happiness are then changed into indignation against our own folly. The black and gloomy shade of death then covers and obscures every dignity, even that of kings and princes.

At present, our passions make the goods of this earth appear different from what they are in reality. Death takes off the veil, and makes them appear what they really are—smoke, dirt, vanity, and wretchedness. O God! of what use are riches, possessions, or kingdoms at death, when nothing remains but a wooden coffin, and a simple garment barely sufficient to cover the body? Of what use are the honors, when they all end in a funeral procession and pompous obsequies, which will be unprofitable to the soul if it be in hell? Of what use is beauty, when after death nothing remains but worms, stench, and horror, and in the end a little fetid dust?

He hath made me, says Job, *as it were a byword of the people, and an example before them.*[1] The rich man, the captain, the minister of state, dies: his death is the general topic of conversation; but if he has led a bad life he will become "a byword of the people, and an example before them."[2] As an instance of the vanity of the world, and even of the divine justice, he will serve for the admonition of others. After burial his body will be mingled

[1] "Posuit me quasi in proverbium vulgi, et exemplum sum coram eis."—*Job*, xvii. 6.

[2] Proverbium vulgi, et exemplum.

with the bodies of the poor. *The small and great are there.*[1] What profit has he derived from the beautiful structure of his body, which is now but a heap of worms? Of what use are the power and authority which he wielded, when his body is now left to rot in a grave, and his soul has, perhaps, been sent to burn in hell? Oh, what misery! to be the occasion of such reflections to others, and not to have made them for his own profit! Let us then persuade ourselves that the proper time for repairing the disorders of the soul is not the hour of death, but the time of health. Let us hasten to do now what we shall not be able to do at that hour. *The time is short.*[2] Everything soon passes away and comes to an end: let us therefore labor to employ all things for the attainment of eternal life

Affections and Prayers.

O God of my soul! O infinite goodness! have mercy on me, who have so grievously offended Thee. I knew that in yielding to sin I should lose Thy grace, and I have voluntarily lost it. Tell me what I must do in order to recover it. If Thou wishest me to repent of my sins, behold I repent of them with my whole heart: I wish to die of sorrow for them. If Thou wishest me to hope for Thy pardon, I hope for it through the merits of Thy blood. If Thou wishest me to love Thee above all things, I give up all, I renounce all the pleasures and goods which the world can give me: I love Thee above every good, O my most amiable Saviour! If Thou wishest me to ask Thy graces, I beg two graces from Thee—do not permit me ever more to offend Thee, and make me love Thee: treat me then as Thou pleasest. Mary, my hope, obtain for me these two graces: through thy intercession I hope to obtain them.

[1] "Parvus et magnus ibi sunt."—*Job*, iii. 19.

[2] Tempus breve est.

THIRD POINT.

Importance of the Last Moment.

How great, then, the folly of those who, for the miserable and transitory delights of this short life, expose themselves to the danger of an unhappy death, and afterward of an unhappy eternity. Oh! how important is that last moment, that last gasp, the last closing of the scene! On it depends an eternity either of all delights or of all torments—a life of eternal happiness or of everlasting woe. Let us consider that Jesus Christ submitted to a cruel and ignominious death in order to obtain for us the grace of a good death. That we may at that last moment die in the grace of God, is the reason why he gives us so many calls, so many lights, and admonishes us by so many threats.

Antisthenes, though a pagan, being asked what was the greatest blessing which man could receive in this world, answered, *A good death.* And what will a Christian say, who knows by faith, that at the moment of death eternity begins, and that at that moment he lays hold of one of two wheels, which draws with it either eternal joy or everlasting torments? If there were two tickets in a lottery, on one of which might be written *Hell* and on the other *Heaven*, what care would you not take to draw that which would give you a right to Paradise, and to avoid the other, by which you would win a place in Hell! O God! how the hands of those unhappy men tremble who are condemned to throw the die on which their life or death depends! How great will be your terror at the approach of that last hour, when you will say: On this moment depends my life or death for eternity; on this depends whether I shall be forever happy or forever in despair! St. Bernardine of Sienna relates, that at death a certain prince exclaimed, with

trembling and dismay: Behold, I have so many kingdoms and palaces in this world; but if I die this night I know not what apartment shall be assigned to me.

Brother, if you believe that you must die, that there is an eternity, that you can die only once, and that if you then err your error will be forever irreparable, why do you not resolve to begin at this moment to do all in your power to secure a good death? St. Andrew Avellino said with trembling: "Who knows what will be my lot in the next life? Shall I be saved or damned?" The thought of the uncertainty of being damned or saved filled St. Louis Bertrand with so much terror, that he could not sleep during the night, because of this thought which would suggest itself to him: "Who knows whether thou wilt be lost?" And will not you, who have committed so many sins, tremble? Oh! hasten to apply a remedy in time; resolve to give yourself sincerely to God, and begin from this moment a life which, at the hour of death, will be to you a source, not of affliction, but of consolation. Give yourself up to prayer, frequent the sacraments, avoid all dangerous occasions, and, if necessary, leave the world, secure to yourself eternal salvation, and be persuaded that to secure eternal life no precaution can be too great.

Affections and Prayers.

O my dear Saviour! how great are my obligations to Thee! How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on so ungrateful a traitor as I have been? Thou hast created me; and in creating me Thou didst see the injuries which I would commit against Thee. Thou didst redeem me by dying for me: and then, too, Thou didst see the ingratitude which I would be guilty of toward Thee. Being placed in the world I turned my back upon Thee by my sins. My soul was dead and rotten, and Thou didst restore me to life. I was blind, and Thou hast enlightened me. I had lost Thee, and Thou didst enable me to find Thee. I was Thy enemy, and Thou hast made me Thy

friend. O God of mercy, make me feel the obligations which I owe Thee, and make me weep over the offences which I have committed against Thee. Ah! take vengeance on me by giving me a great sorrow for my sins. Do not chastise me by the privation of Thy grace and love. O eternal Father, I abhor and detest, above all evils, the injuries I have done Thee. Have mercy on me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Look at Thy Son dead on the cross. "Sanguis ejus super me." May his blood flow upon me, and wash my soul! O King of my heart! *Thy kingdom come.* I am resolved to banish every affection which is not for Thee. I love Thee above all things; come and reign in my soul with undivided sway. Grant that I may love Thee, and love nothing but Thee. I desire to please Thee to the utmost of my ability, and to do Thy will in all things, during the remainder of my life. Bless, O my Father, this my desire, and grant me the grace to keep myself always united to Thee. All my affections I consecrate to Thee, and from this day forward I wish to belong to Thee alone, my treasure, my peace, my hope, my love, my all. I hope for all graces through the merits of Thy Son. Mary, my queen and mother, assist me by thy intercession. Mother of God! pray for me.

CONSIDERATION IV

The Certainty of Death.

"It is appointed unto men once to die."—*Hebr.* ix. 27.

FIRST POINT.

All Must Die.

The sentence of death has been written against all men: you are a man; you must die. "Our other goods and evils," says St. Augustine, "are uncertain; death alone is certain."[1] It is uncertain whether the infant that is just born will be poor or rich, whether he will have good or bad health, whether he will die in youth or in old age. But it is certain that he will die. The stroke of death will fall on all the nobles and monarchs of the earth. When death comes there is no earthly power able to resist it. St. Augustine says, "Fire, water, the sword, and the power of princes may be resisted; but death cannot be resisted."[2] Belluacensis relates that at the end of his life a certain king of France said: "Behold, with all my power, I cannot induce death to wait one more hour for me." When the term of life arrives, it is not deferred a single moment. *Thou hast appointed his bounds, which cannot be passed.*[3]

[1] "Cætera nostra, et bona et mala, incerta sunt; sola mors certa est."—*Serm.* 97. E. B.

[2] "Resistitur ignibus, undis, ferro, resistitur regibus; venit mors: quis ei resistit?"—*In Ps.* cxxi.

[3] "Constituisti terminos ejus, qui præteriri non poterunt."—*Job*, xiv. 5.

Dearly beloved reader, though you should live as many years as you expect, a day will come, and on that day an hour, which will be the last for you. For me, who am now writing, and for you, who read this little book, has been decreed the day and the moment when I will no longer write, and you will no longer read. *Who is the man that shall live and not see death?*[1] The sentence has been already passed. There never has been a man so foolish as to flatter himself that he will not have to die. What has happened to your forefathers, will also happen to you. Of the immense numbers that lived in this country in the beginning of the last century there is not one now living. Even the princes and monarchs of the earth have changed their country: of them nothing now remains but a marble mausoleum with a grand inscription, which only serves to teach us, that of the great ones of this world nothing is left but a little dust inclosed in the tomb. "Tell me," says Bernard, "where are the lovers of the world? Of them nothing remains save ashes and worms."[2]

Since our souls will be eternal, we ought to procure, not a fortune which soon ends, but one that will be everlasting. What would it profit you to be happy here (if it were possible for a soul to be happy without God), if hereafter you must be miserable for all eternity? You have built that house to your entire satisfaction; but remember that you must soon leave it to rot in a grave. You have obtained that dignity which raises you above others; but death will come and reduce you to the level of the poorest peasant.

[1] "Quis est homo, qui vivet, et non videbit mortem?"—*Ps.* lxxxviii. 49.

[2] "Dic mihi, ubi sunt amatores mundi? Nihil ex eis remansit, nisi cineres et vermes."—*Medit.* c. 3.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! unhappy me, who have spent so many years only in offending Thee, O God of my soul. Behold these years are already past: death is perhaps at hand; and what do I find but pains and remorse of conscience? Oh, that I had always served Thee, O my Lord! Fool that I have been! I have lived so many years on this earth, and instead of acquiring merits for heaven, I have laden my soul with debts to the divine justice. Ah, my dear Redeemer, give me light and strength now to adjust my accounts. Death is perhaps not far off. I wish to prepare for that great moment, which will decide my eternal happiness or misery. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now; and since Thou hast given me time to repair the past, behold me, O my God! tell me what I am to do for Thee. Dost Thou wish me to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee? I am sorry for them, and detest them with my whole soul. Dost Thou wish me to spend the remaining years and days of my life in loving Thee? I desire to do so, O God; I have even hitherto frequently resolved to do so; but I have violated my promises. O my Jesus, I will be no longer ungrateful for the great graces Thou hast bestowed upon me. If I do not now change my life, how shall I be able at death to hope for pardon and for Paradise? Behold, I now firmly resolve to begin to serve Thee in earnest. But give me strength; do not abandon me. Thou didst not abandon me when I offended Thee; I therefore hope more confidently for Thy aid, now that I purpose to renounce all things to please Thee. Accept me, then, as one of Thy lovers, O God worthy of infinite love! Receive the traitor that now casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet—that loves Thee, and asks Thy mercy. I love Thee, O my Jesus; I love Thee with my whole heart; I love Thee more than myself. Behold, I am Thine; dispose of me, and of all that I possess, as Thou pleasest. Give me perseverance in obeying Thy commands; give me Thy love; and then do with me whatsoever Thou wishest. Mary, my mother, my hope, my refuge, to thee I recommend myself, to thee I consign my soul: pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

Every Moment we Approach Death.

It is appointed. It is certain, then, that we are all condemned to death. We are born, says St. Cyprian, with the halter round our neck; every step we take brings us nearer to death. My brother, as your name has been one day entered in the register of baptisms, so it will be one day entered in the register of deaths. As in speaking of your ancestors you say: God be merciful to my father, to my uncle, to my brother, so others shall say the same of you. As you have heard the death-bell toll for many, so others shall hear it toll for you.

But what would you say if you saw a man on his way to the place of execution jesting, laughing, looking about in every direction, and thinking only of comedies, festivities, and amusements? And are not you now on your way to death? What is the object of your thoughts? Behold in that grave your friends and relatives, on whom justice has already been executed. How great is the terror and dismay of a man condemned to die, when he beholds his companions suspended on the gallows! Look then at these dead bodies. Each of them says to you: *Yesterday for me; to-day for thee.*[1] The same is said to you by the portraits of your deceased relatives, by the memoranda-books, the houses, the beds, the garments, which they have left.

To know that you must die, that after death you will enjoy eternal glory or suffer eternal torments, that on death depends your eternal happiness or eternal misery, and, with all this before your eyes, not to think of settling your accounts, and of adopting every means of

[1] "Mihi heri, et tibi hodie."—*Eccles.* xxxviii. 23.

securing a happy death, is surely the extreme of folly. We pity those who meet with a sudden and unprovided death; why then do we not endeavor to be always prepared? We too may die suddenly and without preparation. But, sooner or later, with or without warning, whether we think or do not think of it, we shall die; and every hour, every moment, brings us nearer to our end, which shall be the last illness that will send us out of the world.

At every age, the houses, the streets, and the cities are filled with new people; the former inhabitants are borne to the grave, their last resting-place. As the days of life have ended for them, so a time will come when neither I nor you, nor any one alive, will live any longer on this earth. *Days shall be formed and no one in them.*[1] We shall all then be in eternity, which shall be for us either an eternal day of delights, or an eternal night of torments. There is no middle way; it is certain and an article of faith, that either one lot or the other will be ours.

Affections and Prayers.

My beloved Redeemer! I would not dare to appear before Thee, did I not see Thee hanging on the cross, lacerated, despised, and lifeless, for the love of me. My ingratitude has been great; but Thy mercy is still greater. My sins have been very grievous; but Thy merits exceed their enormity. Thy wounds, Thy blood, and Thy death are my hope. I deserved hell by my first sin: to that sin I have added so many other offences. And Thou hast not only preserved my life, but Thou hast also invited me to pardon, and hast offered me peace with so much mercy and so much love. How can I fear that Thou wilt drive me away, now that I love Thee and desire nothing but Thy grace? Yes, my dear Lord, I love Thee with my whole heart, and I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, and I am sorry for having despised Thee, not so much because I have deserved

[1] "Dies formabuntur, et nemo in eis."—*Ps.* cxxxviii. 16.

hell, as because I have offended Thee, my God, who hast loved me so tenderly. O my Jesus, open to me the bosom of Thy goodness; add mercies to mercies. Grant that I may be no longer ungrateful to Thee: change my whole heart. Grant that my heart, which has once despised Thy love, and has exchanged it for the miserable delights of this earth, may now be entirely Thine, and may burn with continual flames for Thee. I hope to gain Paradise, that I may always love Thee. I cannot enjoy in that kingdom a place among the innocent—I must remain among the penitents; but though among these, I wish to love Thee more than the innocent. For the glory of Thy mercy, make all heaven behold so great a sinner inflamed with an ardent love. I resolve henceforth to be all Thine, and to think only of loving Thee. Assist me with Thy light and with Thy grace to execute this desire, which Thou in Thy goodness hast inspired. O Mary! thou who art the mother of perseverance, obtain for me the grace to be faithful to this my promise.

THIRD POINT.

We should Think Continually of Death.

Death is certain. But, O God! this truth Christians know, this they believe and see: and how can they still live so forgetful of death as if they would never have to die? If after this life there were neither hell nor heaven, could they think less of it than they do at present? It is this forgetfulness that makes them lead so wicked a life. My brother, if you wish to live well, spend the remaining days of life with death before your eyes. *O death, thy sentence is welcome.*[1] Oh! how correct the judgments, how well directed the actions, of the man whose judgments are formed, and whose conduct is regulated in view of death! "Consider the end of life," says St. Laurence Justinian, "and you will love nothing in this world."[2]

[1] "O mors! bonum est judicium tuum."—*Ecclus.* xli. 3.

[2] "Consideretur vitæ terminus, et non erit in hoc mundo quod ametur."—*Lign. Vit. de Hum.* c. 4.

All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, of the eyes and the pride of life.[1] All the goods of this earth are reduced to the pleasures of sense, to riches and to honors. But all these are easily despised by the man who considers that he will be soon reduced to ashes, and that he will be soon buried in the earth to be the food of worms.

And in reality it was at the sight of death that the saints despised all the goods of this earth. St. Charles Borromeo kept on his table a skull, in order that he might continually contemplate it. Cardinal Baronius had inscribed on his ring the words, *Memento mori.* (*Remember death.*) The Venerable P. Juvenal Ancina, Bishop of Saluzzo, had this motto written on a skull, "What you are, I was; and what I am, you shall be." A holy hermit being asked when dying how he could be so cheerful, said: "I have always kept death before my eyes; and therefore, now that it has arrived, I see nothing new in it."

What folly would it not be for a traveller, who would think only of acquiring dignities and possessions in the countries through which he had to pass, and should reduce himself to the necessity of living miserably in his native land, where he must remain during his whole life! And is not he a fool who seeks after happiness in this world, where he will remain only a few days, and exposes himself to the risk of being unhappy in the next, where he must live for eternity? We do not fix our affections on borrowed goods, because we know that they must soon be returned to the owner. All the goods of this earth are lent to us: it is folly to set our heart on what we must soon quit. Death shall strip us of them all. The acquisitions and fortunes of this world all terminate in a dying gasp, in a funeral, in a descent into the grave. The house which you have built for yourself you must

[1] Omne quod est in mundo, concupiscentia carnis est, concupiscentia oculorum, et superbia vitæ."—1 *John*, ii. 16.

soon give up to others. The grave will be the dwelling of your body till the day of judgment; thence it will go to heaven or to hell, whither the soul will have gone before.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, at death, all shall be at an end for me. I shall then find only the little I have done for Thee, O my God! and what do I wait for! Do I wait till death come and find me as miserable and defiled with sin as I am at present? Were I now called to eternity I should die with great disquietude on account of my past sins. No, my Jesus; I will not die so discontented. I thank Thee for having given me time to weep over my iniquities, and to love Thee. I wish to begin from this moment. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart for having offended Thee, O Sovereign Good! and I love Thee above all things—I love Thee more than my life. My Jesus! I give myself entirely to Thee. From this moment I embrace and unite Thee to my heart. I now consign my soul to Thee. *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.* I will not wait to give it to Thee when that *proficiscere*, "Depart, O soul," will announce my departure from this world. I will not wait till then to ask Thee to save me. "Jesu sis mihi Jesus." My Saviour, save me now by granting me pardon and the grace of Thy holy love. Who knows but this consideration which I have read may be the last call which Thou wilt give me, and the last mercy which Thou wilt show me? Extend Thy hand, O my love, and deliver me from the mire of my tepidity. Give me fervor, and make me do with great love all that Thou dost demand of me. Eternal Father, for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance, and the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee ardently, during the remainder of my life. O Mary! through the love which thou bearest to thy Jesus, obtain for me these two graces—perseverance and love.

CONSIDERATION V.

Uncertainty of the Hour of Death.

"Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come."—*Luke* xii. 40.

FIRST POINT.

The Moment is Fixed, but it is Unknown.

It is certain that we shall die; but the time of death is uncertain "Nothing," says the author who styles himself Idiota, "is more certain than death; but nothing is more uncertain than the hour of death."[1] My brother, God has already fixed the year, the month, the day, the hour, and the moment when I and you are to leave this earth and go into eternity; but the time is unknown to us. To exhort us to be always prepared, Jesus Christ tells us that death will come unawares, and like a thief in the night. *The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night.*[2] He now tells us to be always vigilant; because, when we least expect him, he will come to judge us. *At what hour you think not, the Son of man will come.*[3] St. Gregory says that, for our good, God conceals from us the hour of death, that we may always be prepared to die.[4] "Since, then," says St. Bernard, "death may take away life at all times and in all places, we ought, if we

[1] "Nihil certius est morte, hora autem mortis nihil incertius."—*De Cont. Mort.* c. 3.

[2] "Sicut fur in nocte ita veniet."—1 *Thess.* v. 2.

[3] "Qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet."—*Luke* xii. 40.

[4] "De morte incerti sumus, ut ad mortem semper parati inveniamur —*Mort.* l. 12 c. 20.

wish to die well and save our souls, to live always in expectation of death."[1]

All know that they must die: but the misfortune is, that many view death at such a distance, that they lose sight of it. Even the old, the most decrepit, and the most sickly, flatter themselves that they will live three or four years longer. But how many, I ask, have we known, even in our own times, to die suddenly—some sitting, some walking, some sleeping? It is certain that not one of these imagined that he should die so suddenly, and on that day on which he died. I say, moreover, that of all who have gone to the other world during the present year, no one imagined that he should die and end his days this year. Few are the deaths which do not happen unexpectedly.

When, therefore, Christian soul, the devil tempts you to sin by saying, To-morrow you will go to confession, let your answer be, How do I know but this will be the last day of my life? If this hour, this moment, in which I would turn my back on God, were the last of my life, so that I would have no time for repentance, what would become of me for all eternity? To how many poor sinners has it happened, that in the act of feasting on the poison of sin they were struck dead and sent to hell? *As fishes are taken with the hook*, says Ecclesiastes, *so men are taken in the evil time.*"[2] The evil time is that in which the sinner actually offends God. The devil tells you that this misfortune will not happen to you; but you should say to him, in answer: If it should happen to me, what will become of me for all eternity?

[1] "Mors ubique te expectat: tu ubique eam expectabis."—*Medit.* c. 3.

[2] "Sicut pisces capiuntur hamo . . . sic capiuntur homines in tempore malo."—*Eccles.* ix. 12.

Affections and Prayers.

Lord! the place in which I ought to be at this moment is not that in which I find myself, but in hell, which I have so often merited by my sins. "Infernus domus mea est." (*Hell is my house.*) St. Peter says: *The Lord waiteth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance.*[1] Then Thou hast had so much patience with me, and hast waited for me, because Thou wishest me not to be lost, but return to Thee by repentance. My God, I return to Thee; I cast myself at Thy feet, and supplicate mercy *Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy.*[2] Lord, to pardon me requires a great and extraordinary act of mercy, because I offended Thee after I had been favored with a special light. Other sinners also have offended Thee, but they have not received the light which Thou gavest to me. But, in spite of all my sinfulness and ingratitude, Thou commandest me to repent of my sins, and to hope for pardon. Yes, my Redeemer, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee, and I hope for pardon through the merits of Thy Passion. Thou, my Jesus, though innocent, wished to die like a criminal on the cross, and to shed all Thy blood in order to wash away my sins. "O sanguis innocentis lava, culpas pœnitentis." O blood of the innocent, wash away the sins of the penitent. O eternal Father! pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ. Hear his prayers, now that He intercedes for me and makes himself my advocate. But it is not enough to receive pardon; I desire also, O God! worthy of infinite love, the grace to love Thee: I love Thee, O Sovereign Good! and I offer Thee henceforth my body, my soul, my liberty, and my will. I wish henceforth to avoid not only grievous, but also venial offences. I will fly from all evil occasions. *Lead us not into temptation.*[3] For the love of Jesus Christ, preserve me from the occasions in which I would offend Thee. *But deliver us from evil:* Deliver me from sin, and then chastise me as Thou pleasest. I accept all infirmities,

[1] "(Deus) patienter agit propter vos, nolens aliquos perire sed omnes ad pœnitentiam reverti."—2 *Peter* iii. 9.

[2] Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam.

[3] Ne nos inducas in tentationem.

pains, and losses which Thou mayest be pleased to send me: it is enough for me not to lose Thy grace and Thy love. *Ask, and you shall receive.*[1] Thou promisest to grant whatsoever we ask; I ask these two graces—holy perseverance and the gift of Thy love. O Mary, mother of mercy! thou dost pray for me: in thee do I put my trust.

SECOND POINT.

We Should Make up Our Accounts.

The Lord does not wish us to be lost; and therefore, by the threat of chastisement, he unceasingly exhorts us to a change of life. *Except you will be converted, He will brandish His sword.*[2] Behold, he says in another place, how many, because they would not cease to offend me, have met with a sudden death, when they were least expecting it, and were living in peace, secure of a life of many years. *For when they shall say: Peace and security: then shall sudden destruction come upon them.*[3] Again he says: *Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish.*[4] Why so many threats of chastisement before the execution of vengeance? It is because he wishes that we amend our lives, and thus avoid an unhappy death. "He," says St. Augustine, "who tells you to beware, does not wish to take away your life."[5] It is necessary, then, to prepare our accounts before the day of account arrives. Dearly beloved Christians, were you to die, and were your lot for eternity to be decided before night would your accounts be ready? Oh! how much would you give to obtain from God another year or month, or

[1] "Petite, et accipietis."—*John*, xvi. 24.

[2] "Nisi conversi fueritis, gladium suum vibrabit."—*Ps.* vii. 13.

[3] "Cum dixerint pax, et securitas, tunc repentinus eis superveniet interitus."—1 *Thess.* v. 3.

[4] "Nisi pœnitentiam habueritis, omnes similiter peribitis."—*Luke*, xiii. 3.

[5] "Nemo, volens ferire, dicit: observa!"—*Serm.* 22 E. B.

even another day, to prepare for judgment? Why then do you not now, that God gives you this time, settle the accounts of your conscience? Perhaps it cannot happen that this shall be the last day for you? *Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day; for His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee.*[1] My brother, to save your soul you must give up sin. "If then you must renounce it at some time, why do you not abandon it at this moment?" says St. Augustine. Perhaps you are waiting till death arrives? But, for obstinate sinners, the hour of death is the time, not of pardon, but of vengeance. *In the time of vengeance He will destroy thee.*

When any one borrows from you a large sum of money you take care to get a written security for it. Who knows, you say, what may happen? Why are you not equally careful about the salvation of your soul, which is of far greater importance to you than all the riches of the earth? When eternity is at stake, why do you not say: Who knows what may happen? If you were to lose a sum of money, all would not be lost; and though in losing it your entire property would be lost, you would have the hope of recovering it. But if at death you lose your soul, then you will truly have lost all, and can never hope to regain it. You are careful to keep an exact account of all the goods you possess, lest, by dying suddenly, any of them might be lost; and if you meet with a sudden death, and find yourself at enmity with God, what will become of your soul for all eternity?

[1] "Non tardes converti ad Dominum, et non differas de die in diem; subito enim veniet ira illius, et in tempore vindictæ disperdet te."—*Eccles.* v. 8.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my Redeemer! Thou hast spent all Thy blood, and hast given Thy life in order to save my soul; and I have often lost it by confidence in Thy mercy. I have, then, so often abused Thy goodness to offend Thee. By doing so, I have deserved to be suddenly struck dead, and to be cast into hell. In a word, I have been engaged in a contest with Thee. Thou didst treat me with mercy, and I offended Thee; Thou didst seek after me, and I fled away from Thee; Thou gavest me time to repair the evil I had done, and I employed that time in adding insults to insults. Lord, make me understand the injustice I have done Thee, and the obligation by which I am bound to love Thee. Ah! my Jesus! how could I be so dear to Thee, who sought after me so often when I chased Thee away? How hast Thou been able to bestow so many graces on one who has given Thee so much displeasure? From this I see the ardor of Thy desire to save me from perdition. I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee. O infinite goodness! Ah, receive this ungrateful sheep, that casts itself sorrowful at Thy feet; receive it and bind it on Thy shoulders, that I may never more fly away from Thee. I will never again abandon Thee. I wish to love Thee; I wish to be Thine; and provided I belong to Thee, I am content to suffer every pain. And what greater punishment can fall upon me than to live without Thy grace, to be separated from Thee, who art my God, who hast created me and died for me? O accursed sins! what have you done? You have made me displease my Saviour, who has loved me so tenderly. Ah, my Jesus, as Thou hast died for me, so I ought to die for Thee. Thou hast died through love for me—I should die through sorrow for having despised Thee. I accept death in whatever manner and at whatever time Thou pleasest to send it. Hitherto I have not loved Thee, or I have loved Thee too little. I do not wish to die in this state. Ah, grant me a little more time, that I may love Thee before I die. Change my heart; wound it; inflame it with Thy holy love. Through that affection of charity which made Thee die for me, grant me this favor. I love Thee with my whole heart. My soul is enamored of Thee. Do not permit me to lose Thee. Give me holy per-

severance; give me Thy holy love. Most holy Mary, my refuge and my mother! perform the office of advocate in my behalf.

THIRD POINT.

We Must Always be Ready.

Be ye ready. The Lord does not tell us to prepare ourselves, but to be prepared, when death arrives. When death comes, it will be almost impossible, in that tempest and confusion, to give ease to a troubled conscience. This, reason tells us: this, God threatens, saying that then he will come, not to pardon, but to avenge, the contempt of his graces. *Revenge is mine, I will repay.*[1] It is, says St. Augustine, a just punishment, that he who was unwilling, when he was able to save his soul, will not be able when he is willing.[2] But you will say: Perhaps I may still be converted and saved. Would you throw yourself into a deep well, saying, Perhaps I may not be drowned? O God! how sin blinds the understanding, and deprives the soul of reason. When there is question of the body, men speak rationally; but when the soul is concerned, they speak like fools.

My brother, who knows but this point which you read is the last warning that God may send you? Let us immediately prepare for death, that it may not come upon us without giving us time to prepare for judgment. St. Augustine says that God conceals from us the last day of life, that we may be always prepared to die.[3] St. Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation, not only with fear, but also with trembling.[4] St. Antonine relates that a certain king of Sicily, to make one of his

1 "Mihi vindicta; ego retribuam, dicit Dominus."—*Rom.* xii. 19.

2 "Justa pœna est ut qui recte facere, cum posset, noluit, amittat posse cum velit."—*De Lib. Arb.* l. 3, c. 13.

3 "Latet ultimus dies, ut observentur omnes dies."—*Serm.* 39 E. B

4 "Cum metu et tremore vestram salutem operamini."—*Phil.* ii. 12

subjects understand the fear with which he sat on the throne, commanded him to sit at table with a sword suspended over him by a slender thread. The apprehension that the thread might give way filled him with so much terror that he could scarcely taste food. We are all in like danger; for the sword of death, on which our eternal salvation depends, may at each moment fall upon us.

It is indeed a question of eternity. *If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in which place soever it shall fall, there shall it lie.*[1] If, when death comes, we are found in the grace of God, oh! with what joy shall we say: I have secured all; I can never again lose God; I shall be happy forever. But, if death finds the soul in sin, with what despair will it exclaim, "Ergo erravimus!"—therefore have I erred; and for my error there will be no remedy for all eternity. The fear of an unhappy eternity made the venerable Father Avila, apostle of Spain, say, when the news of death was brought to him: Oh! that I had a little more time to prepare for death! This fear made the Abbot Agatho, who spent so many years in penance, say at death: What will become of me? Who can know the judgments of God? St. Arsenius, too, trembled at the hour of death; and being asked by his disciples, why he was so much alarmed, he said: "My children this fear is not new to me; I have had it always during my whole life." Above all, holy Job trembled when he said: *What shall I do when the Lord shall rise to judge? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?*[2]

Affections and Prayers.

Ah my God! who has ever loved me more than Thou hast? and whom have I despised and insulted more than I have insulted

[1] "Si ceciderit lignum ad austrum, aut ad aquilonem, in quocumque loco ceciderit, ibi erit."—*Eccles.* xi 3.

[2] "Quid enim faciam, cum surrexerit ad judicandum Deus; et cum quæsierit, quid respondebo illi?"—*Job*, xxxi. 14.

Thee? O blood! O wounds of Jesus, you are my hope. Eternal Father, look not upon my sins, but look at the wounds of Jesus; behold Thy Son dying through pain for my sake, and asking Thee to pardon me. I repent, O my Creator! of having offended Thee. I am sorry for it above all things. Thou didst create me that I might love Thee; and I have lived as if Thou didst create me to offend Thee. For the love of Jesus Christ, pardon me and give me grace to love Thee. I have hitherto resisted Thy will, but I will resist no longer, and will do whatsoever Thou commandest. Thou commandest me to detest the outrages I have offered Thee; behold, I detest them, with my whole heart. Thou commandest me to resolve to offend Thee no more; behold, I resolve to lose my life a thousand times, rather than forfeit Thy grace. Thou commandest me to love Thee with my whole heart; yes, with my whole heart I love Thee, and I wish to love nothing else but Thee. Thou wilt henceforth be my only beloved, my only love. From Thee I ask, and from Thee I hope for holy perseverance. For the love of Jesus Christ, grant that I may be always faithful to Thee, and that I may always say to Thee, with St. Bonaventure: "Unus est dilectus meus, unus est amor meus." My beloved is one, my love is one. I do not wish that my life be employed any longer in giving Thee displeasure; I wish to spend it only in weeping over the offences I have committed against Thee, and in loving Thee. Mary, my Mother! pray for all who recommend themselves to thee,—pray to Jesus also for me.

CONSIDERATION VI.

The Death of the Sinner.

"When distress cometh upon them, they will seek for peace, and there shall be none. Trouble shall come upon trouble."—*Ezek.* vii. 25.

FIRST POINT.

The Sinner will Seek God at Death, but He will not Find Him.

At present sinners banish the remembrance and thought of death; and thus they seek after peace, though they never find it, in the sinful life which they lead. But when they are found in the straits of death, on the point of entering into eternity, *they shall seek peace, and there shall be none.*[1] Then they will not be able to fly from the torture of their sinful conscience. They will seek peace; but what peace can be found by a soul loaded with sins that sting it like so many vipers? What peace can the sinner enjoy when he sees that he must in a few moments appear before the judgment-seat of Jesus Christ, whose law and friendship he has till then despised? Trouble shall come upon trouble.[2] The news of death, which has been already announced, the thought of being obliged to take leave of everything in this world, the remorse of conscience, the time lost, the want of time at present, the rigor of the divine judgment, the unhappy eternity which awaits sinners—all

[1] Angustia superveniente, pacem requirent, et non erit.

[2] Conturbatio super conturbationem veniet.

these things will form a horrible tempest, which will confuse the mind, will increase his apprehensions; and thus, full of confusion and distrust, the dying sinner will pass to the other world.

Trusting in the divine promise, Abraham, with great merit, hoped in God, against human hope.[1] But sinners, with great demerit, hope falsely and to their own perdition, not only against hope but also against faith; because they despise the menaces of God against all who are obstinate in sin. They are afraid of a bad death, but they fear not to lead a wicked life. But who has assured them that they will not suddenly be deprived of life by a thunderbolt, by apoplexy, or by the bursting of a blood-vessel? And were they at death even allowed time for repentance, who assures them that they will sincerely return to God? To conquer bad habits, St. Augustine had to fight against them for twelve years. How will the dying man, who has always lived in sin, be able, in the midst of the pains, the stupefaction, and the confusion of death, to repent sincerely of all his past iniquities? I say *sincerely*, because it is not enough to say and to promise with the tongue: it is necessary to promise with the heart? O God! what terror and confusion will seize the unhappy Christian who has led a careless life, when he finds himself overwhelmed with sins, with the fears of judgment, of hell, and of eternity! Oh! what confusion will these thoughts produce when the dying sinner will find his reason gone, his mind darkened, and his whole frame assailed by the pains of approaching death. He will make his confession; he will promise, weep, and seek mercy from God, but without understanding what he does; and in this tempest of agitation, of remorse, of pains and terrors, he will pass to the other life. *The people shall be troubled, and they*

[1] "Contra spem in spem credidit."—*Rom.* iv. 18.

shall pass.[1] A certain author says that the prayers, the wailings, and promises of dying sinners are like the tears and promises of a man assailed by an enemy who points a dagger to his throat to take away his life. Miserable the man who takes to his bed at enmity with God, and passes from the bed of sickness to eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

O wounds of Jesus! you are my hope. I should despair of the pardon of my sins, and of my eternal salvation, did I not behold you, the fountains of mercy and grace, through which a God has shed all his blood, to wash my soul from the sins which I have committed. I adore you, then, O holy wounds! and trust in you. I detest a thousand times, and curse those vile pleasures by which I have displeased my Redeemer, and have miserably lost his friendship. Looking then at Thee, I raise up my hopes, and turn my affections to Thee. My dear Jesus, Thou deservest to be loved by all men, and to be loved with their whole heart. I have so grievously offended Thee, I have despised Thy love; but, notwithstanding my sinfulness, Thou hast borne with me so long, and invited me to pardon with so much mercy. Ah, my Saviour, do not permit me evermore to offend Thee, and to merit my own damnation. O God! what torture should I feel in hell at the sight of Thy blood and of the great mercies Thou hast shown me. I love Thee, and will always love Thee. Give me holy perseverance. Detach my heart from all love which is not for Thee, and confirm in me a true desire, a true resolution henceforth, to love only Thee, my sovereign good. O Mary, my Mother! draw me to God, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to him before I die.

SECOND POINT.

Anguish of the Dying Sinner.

The poor dying sinner will be assailed, not by one, but by many causes of distress and anguish. On the one hand, the devils will torment him. At death these horrid enemies exert all their strength to secure the perdi-

[1] "Turbabuntur populi et pertransibunt."—*Job*, xxxiv. 20.

ion of the soul that is about to leave this world. They know that they have but little time to gain it, and that if they lose it at death, they shall lose it forever. *The Devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.*[1] The dying man will be tempted, not by one, but by innumerable devils, who will labor for his damnation. *Their houses shall be filled with serpents.*[2] One will say: Fear not; you will recover. Another: You have been deaf to the inspirations of God for so many years, and do you now expect that he will have mercy on you? Another will ask: How can you make satisfaction for all the injuries you have done to the property and character of your neighbors? Another: Do you not see that your confessions have been null, that they have been made without sorrow or a purpose of amendment? How will you now be able to repair them?

On the other hand, the dying man will see himself surrounded by his sins. *Evils*, says David, *shall catch the unjust man unto destruction.*[3] These sins, says St. Bernard, like so many satellites, shall keep him in chains, and shall say unto him: "We are your works; we shall not desert you."[4] We are your offspring; we will not leave you; we will accompany you to the other world, and will present ourselves with you to the Eternal Judge. The dying man will then wish to shake off such enemies; but, to get rid of them, he must detest them, he must return sincerely to God. His mind is darkened, and his heart hardened. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it.*[5] St. Ber-

[1] "Descendit diabolus ad vos habens iram magnam, sciens quod modicum tempus est."—*Apoc.* xii. 12.

[2] "Replebuntur domus eorum draconibus."—*Isa.* xiii. 21.

[3] "Virum injustum mala capient in interitu."—*Ps.* cxxxix. 12.

[4] "Opera tua sumus, non te deseremus."—*Medit.* c. 2.

[5] "Cor durum habebit male in novissimo; et qui amat periculum, in illo peribit."—*Ecclus.* iii. 27.

nard says that the man who has been obstinate in sin during life, will make efforts, but without success, to get out of the state of damnation; and that, overwhelmed by his own malice, he will end his life in the same unhappy state. Having loved sin till death, he has also loved the danger of damnation. Hence the Lord will justly permit him to perish in that danger in which he has voluntarily lived till the end of his life. St. Augustine says that he who is abandoned by sin before he abandons it, will scarcely detest it as he ought; because what he will then do will be done through necessity.[1]

Miserable the sinner that hardens his heart and resists the divine calls: *His heart shall be as hard as a stone and as firm as a smith's anvil.*[2] Instead of yielding to the graces and inspirations of God, and being softened by them, the unhappy man becomes more obdurate, as the anvil is hardened by repeated strokes of the hammer. In punishment of his resistance to the divine calls, he will find his heart in the same miserable state at the very hour of death, at the moment of passing into eternity. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.*[3] Sinners, says the Lord, you have, for the love of creatures, turned your back upon me. *They have turned their back upon me, and not their face; and in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise, and deliver us. Where are the gods thou hast made thee? Let them arise and deliver thee.*[4] They will have recourse to God at death; but he will say to them: Why do you invoke me now? Call on

[1] "Qui prius a peccato relinquitur quam ipse relinquat, non libere sed quasi ex necessitate condemnat."—*De vera pœnit.* c. 17.

[2] "Cor ejus indurabitur quasi lapis, et stringetur quasi malleatoris incus."—*Job*, xli. 15.

[3] Cor durum habebit male in novissimo.

[4] "Verterunt ad me tergum, et non faciem, et tempore afflictionis suæ dicent: Surge, et libera nos. Ubi sunt dii tui, quos fecisti tibi? Surgant, et liberent te."—*Jer.* ii. 27.

creatures to assist you; for they have been your gods. The Lord will address them in this manner, because, in seeking him, they do not sincerely wish to be converted. St. Jerome says that he holds, and that he has learned from experience, that they who have to the end led a bad life, will never die a good death.[1]

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Saviour! assist me; do not abandon me. I see my whole soul covered with the wounds of sin, my passions attack me violently, my bad habits weigh me down. I cast myself at Thy feet; have pity on me and deliver me from so many evils. *In Thee, O Lord! I have hoped; may I not be confounded forever.*[2] Do not suffer a soul that trusts in Thee, to be lost. *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to Thee.*[3] I am sorry for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness. I have done evil, I confess my guilt. I wish to amend my life, whatsoever it may cost me. But if Thou dost not help me by Thy grace, I am lost. Receive, O my Jesus! the rebel who has so grievously outraged Thy majesty. Remember that I have been purchased by Thy blood and Thy life. Through the merits then of Thy Passion and death, receive me into Thy arms, and give me holy perseverance. I was lost, Thou hast called me back: I will resist no longer: to Thee I consecrate myself; bind me to Thy love, and do not permit me evermore to lose Thee by losing Thy grace again. My Jesus! do not permit it. Mary, my queen! do not permit it: obtain for me death, and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should again forfeit the grace of thy Son.

THIRD POINT.

We Must Seek God when we can Find Him.

It is a marvellous thing that God unceasingly threatens sinners with an unhappy death. *Then they*

[1] "Hoc teneo, hoc multiplici experientia didici, quod ei non bonus finis, cui mala semper vita fuit."—*In Epis. Euseb. ad Dam.*

[2] "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in æternum."—*Ps.* xxx. 6.

[3] "Ne tradas bestiis animas confitentium tibi."—*Ps.* lxxiii. 19.

shall call upon me, and I will not hear.[1] *Will God hear his cry when distress shall come upon him?*[2] *I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock.*[3] According to St. Gregory, God laughs when he is unwilling to show mercy.[4] *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time.*[5]

The Lord pronounces the same threats in so many other places: and sinners live in peace as securely as if God had certainly promised to give them, at death, pardon and paradise. It is true that at whatsoever hour the sinner is converted God promises to pardon him. But he has not promised that sinners will be converted at death: on the contrary, he has often protested that they who live in sin shall die in sin. *You shall die in your sins.*[6] He has declared that they who seek him at death shall not find him.[7] *You shall seek me, and shall not find me.*[8] We must, therefore, seek God while he may be found.[9] A time shall come when it will not be in our power to find him. Poor blind sinners! they put off their conversion till death, when there will be no more time for repentance. "The wicked," says Oleaster, "have never learned to do good unless when the time for doing good is no more."[10] God wills the salvation of all: but he takes vengeance on obstinate sinners.

Should any man in a state of sin be seized with apoplexy and be deprived of his senses, what sentiments of

[1] "Tunc invocabunt me, et non exaudiam."—*Prov.* i. 28.

[2] "Numquid Deus audiet clamorem ejus, cum venerit super eum angustia?"—*Job*, xxvii. 9.

[3] "In interitu vestro ridebo et subsannabo."—*Prov.* i. 26.

[4] "Ridere Dei est nolle misereri."—*Mor.* l. 9, c. 20.

[5] "Mea est ultio, et ego retribuam in tempore, ut labatur pes eorum."—*Deut.* xxii. 35.

[6] "In peccato vestro moriemini."—*John*, viii. 21, 24.

[7] "Moriemini in peccatis vestris."—*Ibid.* 24.

[8] "Quæretis me, et non invenietis."—*John*, vii. 34.

[9] "Quærite Dominum dum inveniri potest."—*Isa.* lv. 6.

[10] Impii nusquam didicerunt bene facere, nisi cum non est tempus bene faciendi.

compassion would be excited in all who should see him die without the sacraments and without signs of repentance! And how great should be their delight, if he recovered the use of his senses, asked for absolution, and made acts of sorrow for his sins! But is not he a fool who has time to repent and prefers to continue in sin? or who returns to sin, and exposes himself to the danger of being cut off by death without the sacraments, and without repentance? A sudden death excites terror in all; and still how many expose themselves to the danger of dying suddenly, and of dying in sin?

Weight and balance are the judgments of the Lord.[1] We keep no account of the graces which God bestows upon us; but he keeps an account of them, he measures them; and when he sees them despised to a certain degree, he then abandons the sinner in his sin, and takes him out of life in that unhappy state. Miserable the man who defers his conversion till death. St. Augustine says: "The repentance which is sought from a sick man is infirm."[2] St. Jerome teaches, that of a hundred thousand sinners who continue in sin till death, scarcely one will be saved.[3] St. Vincent Ferrer writes that it is a greater miracle to bring such sinners to salvation, than to raise the dead to life.[4]

What sorrow, what repentance, can be expected at death from the man who has loved sin till that moment? Bellarmine relates that when he exhorted to contrition a certain person whom he assisted at death, the dying man said that he did not know what was meant by con-

[1] "Pondus et statera judicia Domini sunt.—*Prov.* xvi. 11.

[2] "Pœnitentia quæ ab infirmo petitur infirma est."—*Serm.* 255, E. B. *App.*

[3] "Vix de centum millibus quorum mala vita fuit, meretur in morte a Deo habere indulgentiam unus."—*In Ep. Eus. ad Dam.*

[4] "Majus miraculum est quod male viventes facient bonum finem, quam suscitare mortuos."—*De Nat. V. S.* 1.

trition. The holy Bishop endeavored to explain it to him; but he said: *Father, I do not understand you; these things are too high for me.* He died in that state, leaving, as the venerable Cardinal has written, *sufficiently evident signs of his damnation.* St. Augustine says that by a just chastisement the sinner who has forgotten God during life shall forget himself at death.[1]

Be not deceived, says the Apostle, *God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall he reap corruption.*[2] It would be a mockery of God to live in contempt of his laws, and afterward to reap remuneration and eternal glory. But *God is not mocked.* What we sow in this life, we reap in the next. For him who sows the forbidden pleasures of the flesh, nothing remains but corruption, misery, and eternal death.

Beloved Christian, what is said for others is also applicable to you. Tell me: if you were at the point of death, given over by the physicians, deprived of your senses, and in your last agony, with what fervor would you ask of God another month or week to settle the accounts of your conscience! God at present gives you this time: thank him for it, and apply an immediate remedy to the evil you have done; adopt all the means of finding yourself in the grace of God when death comes; for then there will be no more time to acquire his friendship.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! who would have borne with me so patiently as Thou hast? If Thy goodness were not infinite, I would despair of pardon. But I have to deal with a God who has died for my

[1] "Æquissime percutitur peccator ut moriens obliviscatur sui qui vivens oblitus est Dei."—*S.* 257 E. B. *App.*

[2] "Nolite errare, Deus non irridetur; quæ enim seminaverit homo, hæc et metet: qui seminat in carne sua, de carne et metet corruptionem."—*Gal.* vi. 7.

salvation. Thou commandest me to hope, and I will hope. If my sins terrify and condemn me, Thy merits and Thy promises encourage me. Thou hast promised the life of Thy grace to all who return to Thee. *Return ye and live.*[1] Thou hast promised to embrace him who is converted to Thee. *Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you.*[2] Thou hast said that Thou knowest not how to despise a contrite and humble heart.[3] Behold me, O Lord; I return to Thee; I acknowledge that I deserve a thousand hells; I am sorry for having offended Thee. I firmly promise never again to offend Thee voluntarily, and to love Thee forever. Ah! do not suffer me any longer to be ungrateful to such unbounded goodness. O eternal Father, through the merits of the obedience of Jesus Christ, who died to obey Thee, grant that I may till death be obedient to all Thy wishes. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good! and through the love which I bear Thee, I desire to obey Thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love; I ask nothing more. Mary, my Mother! intercede for me.

[1] "Revertimini et vivite."—*Ezek.* xviii. 32.

[2] "Convertimini ad me et ego convertar ad vos."—*Zach.* i. 3.

[3] "Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies."—*Ps.* l. 19.

CONSIDERATION VII.

Sentiments of a Dying Christian, who has been Careless about the Duties of Religion and has thought but little of Death.

"Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die, and shalt not live." —*Isa.* xxxviii. 1.

FIRST POINT.

Sad State of the Worldling at Death.

IMAGINE yourself at the bedside of a negligent Christian, who is overpowered by sickness, and has but a few hours to live. Behold him oppressed by pains, by swoons, by suffocation, by want of breath, by cold perspirations, his reason so impaired, that he feels but little, understands little, and can speak but little. The greatest of all his miseries is, that though at the point of death, instead of thinking of his soul and of preparing accounts for eternity, he fixes all his thoughts on physicians, on the remedies by which he may be rescued from sickness, and from the pains which will soon put an end to life. "They are unable to have any other thought of themselves,"[1] says St. Laurence Justinian, speaking of the condition of negligent Christians at the hour of death. They can think only of themselves. Surely his relatives and friends will admonish the dying Christian of his danger? No; there is not one among all his relatives and friends who has the courage to announce to him the news of

[1] "Nihil aliud quam de se cogitare sufficiunt."—*De Cont. Mundi*, c. 15.

death, and to advise him to receive the last sacraments. Through fear of offending him, they all refuse to inform him of his danger.—O my God! from this moment I thank Thee, that at death I shall, through Thy grace, be assisted by my beloved brothers of my Congregation, who will then have no other interest than that of my eternal salvation, and will all help me to die well.

But though he is not admonished of his approaching death, the poor sick man, seeing the family in disorder, the medical consultations repeated, the remedies multiplied, frequent, and violent, is filled with confusion and terror. Assaulted by fears, remorse, and distrust, he says within himself: Perhaps the end of my days has arrived. But what will be his feelings when he is told that death is at hand? "Take order with thy house; for thou shalt die, and shalt not live."[1] What pain will he feel in hearing these words: Your illness is mortal: it is necessary to receive the last sacraments, to unite yourself to God, and to prepare to bid farewell to the world. What! exclaims the sick man; must I take leave of all—of my house, my villa, my relatives, friends, conversations, games, and amusements? Yes, you must take leave of all. The lawyer is already come, and writes this last farewell: *I bequeath such-a-thing and such-a-thing, etc.* And what does he take away with him? Nothing but a miserable rag, which will soon rot with him in the grave.

Oh! with what melancholy and agitation will the dying man be seized at the sight of the tears of the servants, at the silence of his friends, who have not courage to speak in his presence. But his greatest anguish will arise from the remorse of his conscience, which in that tempest will be rendered more sensible by the remembrance of the disorderly life he has until then led, in

[1] Dispone domui tuæ, quia morieris tu, et non vives.

spite of so many calls and lights from God, of so many admonitions from spiritual Fathers, and of so many resolutions made, but never executed, or afterward neglected. He will then say: O unhappy me! I have had so many lights from God, so much time to tranquillize my conscience, and have not done so. Behold, I am now arrived at the gate of death. What would it have cost me to have avoided such an occasion of sin, to have broken off such a friendship, to have frequented the tribunal of penance? Ah, very little; but, though they had cost me much pain and labor, I ought to have submitted to every inconvenience in order to save my soul, which is of more importance to me than all the goods of this world. Oh! if I had put into execution the good resolutions which I made on such an occasion; if I had continued the good works which I began at such a time, how happy should I now feel! But these things I have not done, and now there is no more time to do them. The sentiments of dying sinners who have neglected the care of their souls during life, are like those of the damned who mourn in hell over their sins as the cause of their sufferings, but mourn without fruit and without remedy.

Affections and Prayers.

Lord! if it were at this moment announced to me that my death was at hand, such would be the painful sentiments that would torture my soul. I thank Thee for giving me this light, and for giving me time to enter into myself. O my God! I will no longer fly from Thee. Thou hast sought after me long enough. I have just reason to fear that Thou wilt abandon me, if I now refuse to give myself to Thee, and continue to resist Thy calls. Thou hast given me a heart to love Thee, and I have made so bad use of it. I have loved creatures and have not loved Thee, my Creator and Redeemer! who hast given Thy life for the love of me. Instead of loving Thee, how often have I offended, how often have I despised Thee, and turned my back upon Thee? I knew that by such a sin I insulted

Thee, and still I have committed it. My Jesus! I am sorry for all my sins; they displease me above all things. I wish to change my life. I renounce all the pleasures of the world in order to love and please Thee, O God of my soul! Thou hast given me strong proofs of Thy love. I too would wish before death to give Thee some proof of my love. From this moment I accept all the infirmities, crosses, insults, and offences that I receive from men; give me strength to submit to them with peace. I wish to bear them all for the love of Thee. I love Thee, O infinite goodness! I love Thee above every good. Increase my love, give me holy perseverance. Mary, my hope! pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

Desire of the Worldling at Death.

Oh, how clearly are the truths of faith seen at the hour of death! But then they only serve to increase the anguish of the dying Christian who has led a bad life, particularly if he has been consecrated to God, and has had greater facilities for serving him, more time for exercises of piety, more good examples and more inspirations. O God! what torture will he feel in thinking and saying: I have admonished others, and my life has been worse than theirs. I have left the world, and have cherished attachment to worldly pleasures and vanities. What remorse will he feel in thinking that with the lights which he had received from God a pagan would become a saint! With what pain will his soul be racked when he remembers that he ridiculed in others certain practices of piety, as if they were weaknesses of mind; and that he praised certain worldly maxims of self-esteem, or of self-love, such as: It is necessary to seek our own advancement; We ought to avoid suffering, and indulge in every amusement within our reach.

The desire of the wicked shall perish.[1] How ardently

[1] "Desiderium peccatorum peribit."—*Ps* cxi. 10.

shall we desire at death the time which we now squander away? In his dialogues, St. Gregory relates that a certain rich man, called Crisorius, who had led a wicked life, seeing at death the devils who came to carry him off, exclaimed: Give me time, give me time until to-morrow. They replied: O fool! do you now seek for time? You have had so much time, but have wasted it and have spent it in committing sin; and now you seek for time. Time is now no more. The unhappy man continued to cry out and call for assistance. To his son Maximus, a monk, who was present, he said: O my son, assist me! O Maximus, come to my aid! With his face on fire, he flung himself furiously from one side of the bed to the other; and in that state of agitation, screaming aloud, like one in despair, he breathed forth his unhappy soul.

Alas! during this life, these fools love their folly; but at death they open their eyes, and confess that they have been fools. But this only serves to increase their fear of repairing past evils; and dying in this state, they leave their salvation very uncertain. My brother, now that you are reading this point, I imagine that you too say: This is indeed true. But if this is true, your folly and misfortune will be still greater, if after knowing these truths during life, you neglect to apply a remedy in time. This very point which you have read will be a sword of sorrow for you at death.

Since, then, you now have time to avoid a death so full of terror, begin instantly to repair the past; do not wait for that time in which you can make but little preparation for judgment. Do not wait for another month, nor for another week. Perhaps this light which God in his mercy gives you now may be the last light and the last call for you. It is folly to be unwilling to think of death, which is certain, and on which eternity depends; but it would be still greater folly to reflect on it, and not pre-

pare for judgment. Make now the reflections and resolutions which you would then make; they may be made now with profit—then without fruit; now, with confidence of saving your soul—then, with diffidence as to your salvation. A gentleman who was about to take leave of the court of Charles the Fifth, to live only to God, was asked by the Emperor why he thought of quitting the court. The gentleman answered: To secure salvation, it is necessary that some time spent in penitential works should intervene between a disorderly life and death.

Affections and Prayers.

O my God! I will no longer abuse Thy mercy. I thank Thee for the light Thou now givest me, and I promise to change my life. I see that Thou canst not bear with me any longer. I will not wait until Thou either dost send me to hell, or dost abandon me to a wicked life, which would be a greater punishment than death itself. Behold, I cast myself at Thy feet; receive me into favor. I do not deserve Thy grace; but Thou hast said: *The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him in whatsoever day he shall turn from his wickedness.*[1] If then, O my Jesus! I have hitherto offended Thy infinite goodness, I now repent with my whole heart, and hope for pardon. I will say with St. Anselm: "Ah! since Thou hast redeemed me by Thy blood, do not permit me to be lost on account of my sins." Look not on my ingratitude; but have regard to the love which made Thee die for me. If I have lost Thy grace, Thou hast not lost the power of restoring it to me. Have mercy on me then, O my dear Redeemer! Pardon me, and give me grace to love Thee; for I purpose henceforth to love nothing but Thee. Among so many possible creatures, Thou hast chosen me to love Thee. I make choice of Thee, O Sovereign Good! to love Thee above every good. Thou goest before me with Thy cross; I am willing to follow Thee with the cross which Thou wilt give me to carry. I embrace every mortification and every pain that comes

[1] "Impietas impii non nocebit ei, in quacumque die conversus fuerit."—*Ezek.* xxxiii. 12.

from Thee. Do not deprive me of Thy grace, and I am content. Mary, my hope! obtain for me from God perseverance and the grace to love him; and I ask nothing more.

THIRD POINT.

Tardy Regrets of a Dying Person.

The dying man who has neglected the salvation of his soul, will find thorns in everything that is presented to him—thorns in the remembrance of past amusements, rivalries overcome and pomps displayed; thorns in the friends who will visit him, and in whatever their presence shall bring before his mind; thorns in the spiritual Fathers who assist him in turn; thorns in the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist, and Extreme Unction, which he must receive; thorns even in the crucifix which is placed before him. In that sacred image he will read his want of correspondence to the love of a God who died for his salvation.

O fool that I have been! the poor sick man will say, with the lights and opportunities that God has given me, I could have become a saint. I could have led a life of happiness in the grace of God; and after so many years that he gave me, what do I find but torments, distrust, fears, remorse of conscience and accounts to render to God? I shall scarcely save my soul. And when will he say this? When the oil in the lamp is on the point of being consumed, and the scene of this world is about to close forever; when he finds himself in view of two eternities, one happy, the other miserable; when he is near that last gasp on which depends his everlasting bliss or eternal despair, as long as God shall be God. What would he then give for another year, month, or even another week, with the perfect use of his faculties? In the stupefaction, oppression of the chest, and difficulty

of breathing, under which he then labors, he can do nothing; he is incapable of reflection, or of applying his mind to the performance of any good act: he is, as it were, shut up in a dark pit of confusion, where he can see nothing but the ruin which threatens him, and which he feels himself unable to avert. He would wish for time; but the assisting priest shall say to him, *Proficiscere;* adjust your accounts as well as you can in the few moments that remain, and depart. Do you not know that death waits for no one, respects no one?

Oh! with what dismay will he then think and say: This morning I am alive; this evening I shall probably be dead! To-day I am in this room; to-morrow I shall be in the grave! and where will my soul be found? With what terror will he be seized when he sees the death candle prepared? When he hears his relatives ordered to withdraw from his apartment, and to return to it no more? When his sight begins to grow dim? Finally, how great will be his alarm and confusion when he sees that, because death is at hand, the candle is lighted? O candle, O candle, how many truths will you then unfold! How different will you make things appear then from what they appear at present! O how clearly will you show the dying sinner that all the goods of this world are vanities, folly, and lies? But of what use is it to understand these truths when the time is past of profiting by them?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! Thou wilt not my death, but that I be converted and live. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now, and I thank Thee for the light which Thou givest me at this moment. I know the error I have committed in preferring to Thy friendship the vile and miserable goods for which I have despised Thee. I repent, and am sorry with my whole heart for having done Thee so great an injury. Ah! do not cease, during the remainder of my life, to assist me by Thy light and

grace to know and to do all that I ought to do in order to amend my life. What shall it profit me to know these truths when I shall be deprived of the time in which they may be reduced to practice? *Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to Thee.*[1] When the devil tempts me to offend Thee again, ah! I entreat Thee, my Jesus, through the merits of Thy Passion, to stretch forth Thy hand and to preserve me from falling into sin, and from becoming again the slave of my enemies. Grant that in all temptations I may have recourse to Thee, and that I may not cease to recommend myself to Thee as long as the temptations continue. Thy blood is my hope, and Thy goodness is my love. I love Thee, my God, worthy of infinite love; grant that I may always love Thee. Make known to me the things from which I ought to detach my heart, that I may be entirely Thine: I wish to detach my heart from them: but give me strength to execute this desire. O Queen of heaven! O Mother of God! pray for me, a sinner. Obtain for me the grace that in all temptations I may never omit to have recourse to Jesus and to thee, who, by thy intercession, preserves from falling into sin all who invoke thee.

[1] "Ne tradas bestiis animas confitentes tibi."—*Ps.* lxxiii. 19.

CONSIDERATION VIII.

The Death of the Just.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."—*Ps.* cxv. 15.

FIRST POINT.

The Death of the Just is a Rest.

VIEWED according to the senses, death excites fear and terror; but viewed with the eyes of faith, it is consoling and desirable. To sinners it appears full of terror; but to the saints it is amiable and precious. "It is precious," says St. Bernard, "as the end of labors, the consummation of victory, the gate of life."[1] It is the end of toils and labor. *Man*, says Job, *born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries.*[2] Behold a picture of our life: it is short and all full of miseries, of infirmities, of fears, and of passions. What, says Seneca, do worldlings, who desire a long life, seek, but a continuation of torments?[3] What, says St. Augustine, is a prolongation of life, but a prolongation of suffering?[4] Yes; for, as St. Ambrose tells us, the present life is given us, not for repose, but that we may labor, and by our toils merit eternal glory.[5] Hence Tertullian has justly said, that

[1] "Pretiosa mors, tanquam finis laborum, victoriæ consummatio, vitæ janua."—*In Trans. Mal.* s. 1.

[2] "Homo natus de muliere, brevi vivens tempore, repletur multis miseriis."—*Job.* xiv. 1.

[3] "Tanquam vita petitur supplicii mora."—*Ep.* ci.

[4] "Quid est diu vivere, nisi diu torqueri."—*Serm.* 84. E. B.

[5] "Hæc vita homini non ad quietem data est sed ad laborem."—*Serm* 42.

when God abridges life he abridges pain.[1] Hence, though man has been condemned to death in punishment of sin, still the miseries of this life are so great, that, according to St. Ambrose, death appears to be a remedy and relief, rather than a chastisement.[2] God pronounces happy all who die in his grace, because they terminate their labors and go to repose. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now saith the spirit, that they may rest from their labors.*[3]

The torments which afflict sinners at death do not disturb the peace of the saints. *The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them.*[4] That *proficiscere* which is so full of terror to worldlings does not alarm the saints. The just man is not afflicted at the thought of being obliged to take leave of the goods of the earth, for he has always kept his heart detached from them. During life he has constantly said to the Lord: *Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.*[5] Happy you, said the Apostle to his disciples, who have been robbed of your goods for the sake of Jesus Christ. *You took with joy the being stripped of your goods, knowing that you had a better and a lasting substance.*[6] The saint is not afflicted at bidding an eternal farewell to honors, for he always hated them, and considered them to be what they really are—smoke and vanity. He is not afflicted in leaving relatives, for he loved them only in God, and at death he recommends

[1] Longum Deus admit tormentum, cum vitam concedit brevem.

[2] "Ut mors remedium videatur esse, non pœna."—*De Cain et Ab.* l. 2, c. 10

[3] "Beati mortui, qui in Domino moriuntur Amodo jam dicit spiritus, ut requiescant a laboribus suis."—*Apoc.* xiv. 13.

[4] "Justorum animæ in manu Dei sunt, et non tanget illos tormentum mortis."—*Wis.* ill. 1.

[5] "Deus cordis mei, et pars mea, Deus, in æternum."—*Ps.* lxxii. 26

[6] "Rapinam bonorum vestrorum cum gaudio suscepistis, cognoscentes vos habere meliorem et manentem substantiam."—*Heb.* x. 34

them to his heavenly Father, who loves them more than he does; and having a secure confidence of salvation, he expects to be better able to assist them from heaven than on this earth. In a word, he who has constantly said during life, *My God and my all*, continues to repeat it with greater consolation and greater tenderness at the hour of death.

He who dies loving God, is not disturbed by the pains of death; but, seeing that he is now at the end of life, and that he has no more time to suffer for God, or to offer him other proofs of his love, he accepts these pains with joy. With affection and peace he offers to God these last moments of life, and feels consoled in uniting the sacrifice of his death to the sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for him on the Cross to his eternal Father. Thus he dies happily, saying: *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest.*[1] Oh! how great the peace of the Christian who dies abandoned and reposing in the arms of Jesus Christ, who has loved us to death, and has condescended to suffer so cruel a death in order to obtain for us a death full of sweetness and consolation.

Affections and Prayers.

O my beloved Jesus! who, to obtain for me a happy death, hast freely submitted to so painful a death on Calvary, when shall I see Thee? The first time I shall behold Thee, I shall see Thee as my judge in the very place in which I shall expire. What shall I then say? What wilt Thou say to me? I will not wait till that moment to think of what I shall say; I will meditate on it now. I will say to Thee: My Redeemer! Thou art the God who hast died for me. I have hitherto offended Thee; I have been ungrateful to Thee; I did not deserve pardon, but afterward, assisted by Thy grace, I have entered into myself, and, during the remainder of my life, I have bewailed my sins, and Thou hast pardoned me. Pardon me again, now that I am at Thy feet, and give me a general absolution of all

[1] "In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam."—*Ps.* iv. 9.

my sins. I did not deserve ever again to love Thee, because I have despised Thy love; but Thou in Thy mercy hast drawn my heart to Thee, so that if I have not loved Thee as Thou deservest, I have at least loved Thee above all things, and have left all to please Thee. I see that Paradise and the possession of Thy divinity in Thy kingdom is too much for me; but I cannot live at a distance from Thee, now, especially, after Thou hast shown me Thy amiable and beautiful countenance. I therefore ask for Paradise, not to enjoy greater delights, but to love Thee more perfectly. Send me to Purgatory as long as Thou pleasest. Defiled as I am at present, I do not wish to enter into the land of purity, and to see myself among those pure souls. Send me to be purified; but do not banish me forever from Thy presence. I shall be content to be one day, whenever Thou pleasest, called to Paradise to sing Thy mercies for all eternity. Ah, my beloved Judge! raise Thy hand and bless me; tell me that I am Thine, and that Thou art and shalt be forever mine. I will always love Thee, and Thou wilt forever love me. Behold, I go to a distance from Thee; I go into fire: but I go in peace, because I go to love Thee, my Redeemer, my God, my all! I am content to go; but during my absence from Thee, I go, O Lord! to count the moments that will elapse before Thou callest me. Have mercy on a soul that loves Thee with all its power, and that sighs to see Thee, that it may love Thee better.

This I hope, O my Jesus! to say to Thee at death. I entreat Thee to give me the grace to live in such a manner that I may then say to Thee what I have now thought. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love. Assist me, O Mary! Mother of God, pray to Jesus for me.

SECOND POINT.

The Death of the Just is a Victory.

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more.[1] Then, at death the Lord will wipe away from the eyes of his servants all the tears that they have shed in this world, where they live in the midst of pains,

[1] "Absterget Deus omnem lacrymam ab oculis eorum, et mors ultra non erit."—*Apoc.* xxi. 4.

of fears, of dangers, and of combats with hell. The greatest consolation which a soul that has loved God will experience in hearing the news of death, will arise from the thought that it will soon be delivered from the many dangers of offending God, to which it is exposed in this life, from so many troubles of conscience, and from so many temptations of the devil. The present life is an unceasing warfare with hell, in which we are in continual danger of losing our souls and God. St. Ambrose says that in this life *we walk among snares:* we walk continually amid the snares of enemies, who lie in wait to deprive us of the life of grace. It was this danger that made St. Peter of Alcantara say at death to a religious who, in attending the saint, accidentally touched him: "Brother, remove, remove from me; for I am still alive, and am still in danger of being lost." The thought of being freed by death from the danger of sin consoled St. Teresa, and made her rejoice as often as she heard the clock strike, that another hour of the combat was passed. Hence she would say: "In each moment of life I may sin and lose God." Hence, the news of approaching death filled the saints with consolation; because they knew that their struggles and dangers were soon to have an end, and that they would soon be in secure possession of that happy lot in which they could never more lose God.

It is related in the lives of the Fathers, that one of them who was very old, when dying, smiled while the others wept. Being asked why he smiled, he said: 'Why do you weep at seeing me go to rest?'[1] Likewise St. Catharine of Sienna in her last moments said: "Rejoice with me; for I quit this land of pains, and go to a place of peace." If, says St. Cyprian, you lived in a house whose walls, and roof, and floors were tottering,

[1] "Ex labore ad requiem vado, et vos ploratis?"—*Lib.* 5, l. 11, n. 52.

and threatened destruction, how ardently would you desire to fly from it! In this life everything menaces the ruin of the soul; the world, hell, the passions, the rebellious senses, all draw us to sin and eternal death. *Who*, exclaimed the Apostle, *shall deliver me from the body of this death?*[1] Oh! how great will be the joy of the soul in hearing these words: "Come, my spouse, depart from that land of tears, from the dens of lions who seek to devour you, and to rob you of the divine grace."[2] Hence, St. Paul, sighing for death said that Jesus Christ was his only life; and therefore he esteemed death his greatest gain, because by death he acquired that life which never ends. *To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*[3]

In taking a soul while it is in the state of grace out of this world, where it may change its will and lose his friendship, God bestows on it a great favor. *He was taken away lest wickedness should alter his understanding.*[4] Happy in this life is the man that lives in union with God; but, as the sailor is not secure until he has arrived at the port and escaped the tempest, so the soul cannot enjoy complete happiness until it has left this world in the grace of God. "Praise," says St. Maximus, "the felicity of the sailor: but not until he has reached the port."[5] Now, if at his approach to the port the sailor rejoices, how much greater ought to be the joy and gladness of a Christian who is at the point of securing eternal salvation?

Moreover, it is impossible in this life to avoid all venial

[1] "Quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?"—*Rom* vii. 24.

[2] "Veni de Libano sponsa mea, veni de cubilibus leonum."—*Cant.* iv. 8.

[3] "Mihi vivere Christus est et mori lucrum."—*Phil.* i. 21.

[4] "Raptus est ne malitia mutaret intellectum ejus."—*Wis* iv. 11.

[5] "Lauda navigantis, felicitatem sed cum pervenit ad portum."—*In Nativ. D. Fus.* hom. 2.

sins. *For*, says the Holy Ghost, *a just man shall fall seven times.*[1] He who quits this life ceases to offend God. "For," says St. Ambrose, "what is death but the burial of vices?"[2] This consideration makes the souls that love God long for death. The Venerable Vincent Caraffa consoled himself at death, saying: "By ceasing to live, I cease forever to offend God." And St. Ambrose said: "Why do we desire this life, in which, the longer we live, the more we are loaded with sins?"[3] He who dies in the grace of God can never more offend him, says the same holy doctor.[4] Hence, the Lord praises the dead more than any man living, though he be a saint.[5] A certain spiritual man gave directions that the person who should bring him the news of death, should say: "Console yourself; for the time has arrived when you will no longer offend God."

Affections and Prayers.

Into Thy hands, I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of truth.[6] Ah, my sweet Redeemer! what should become of me if Thou hadst deprived me of life when I was far from Thee? I should now be in hell, where I could never love Thee. I thank Thee for not having abandoned me, and for having bestowed on me so many great graces in order to gain my heart. I am sorry for having offended Thee. I love Thee above all things. Ah! I entreat Thee to make me always sensible of the evil I have done in despising Thee, and of the love which Thy infinite goodness merits. I love Thee; and I desire to die soon, if such be Thy will, that I may be freed from the danger of ever again losing Thy grace, and that I may be

[1] "Septies enim cadet justus."—*Prov.* xxiv. 16.

[2] "Quid est mors, nisi sepultura vitiorum?"—*De bon. mort.* c. 4.

[3] "Quid vitam istam desideramus, in qua quanto diutius quis fuerit, tanto majori oneratur sarcina peccatorum?"—*Ibid.* c. 2.

[4] "Mortuus descivit peccare."—*In Ps.* cxviii. s. 18.

[5] "Laudavi magis mortuos quam viventes."—*Eccles.* iv. 2.

[6] "In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum; redemisti me, Domine Deus veritatis."—*Ps.* xxx. 6.

secure of loving Thee forever. Ah, my beloved Jesus! during these remaining years of my life, give me strength to do something for Thee before I die. Give me strength against all temptations, and against my passions, but particularly against the passion which has hitherto most violently drawn me to sin. Give me patience in all infirmities, and under all the injuries which I may receive from men. I now, for the love of Thee, pardon all who have shown me any contempt, and I beg of Thee to bestow upon them the graces which they stand in need of. Give me strength to be more diligent in avoiding even venial faults, about which I have been hitherto negligent. My Saviour! assist me. I hope for all graces through Thy merits. O Mary, my Mother, and my hope! I place unbounded confidence in thee.

THIRD POINT.

The Death of the Just is the Entrance to Life.

Death is not only the end of labors, but it is also the gate of life, says St. Bernard.[1] He who wishes to see God must necessarily pass through this gate. *This is the gate of the Lord; the just shall enter into it.*[2] St. Jerome entreated death to open its gates to him. "Death, my sister, if you do not open the door to me, I cannot enter to enjoy my Lord."[3] Seeing in his house a picture which represented a skeleton with a scythe in the hand, St. Charles Borromeo sent for a painter, and ordered him to erase the scythe, and to paint a golden key, in order that he might be more and more inflamed with a desire of death, which opens Paradise, and admits us to the vision of God.

If, says St. John Chrysostom, a king had prepared for one of his subjects apartments in his own palace, but for the present obliged him to live in a tent, how ardently

[1] Finis laborum, vitæ janua.

[2] "Hæc porta Domini, justi intrabunt in eam."—*Ps.* cxvii. 20.

[3] "Aperi mihi, dulcis soror."—*In Ep. Eus. ad Dam.*

would the vassal sigh for the day on which he should leave the tent to enter into the palace! In this life the soul, being in the body, is as it were confined in a prison, which it must leave in order to enter the celestial palace. Hence, David prayed to the Lord to bring his soul out of prison.[1] When the holy Simeon held the infant Jesus in his arms, he asked no other grace than to be delivered from the prison of the present life. "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord."[2] "As if detained by necessity, he," says St. Ambrose, "begs to be dismissed." The Apostle desired the same grace when he said: *I am straitened, having a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ*[3]

How great was the joy of the cup-bearer of Pharaoh when he heard from Joseph that he should soon be rescued from the prison and restored to his situation! And will not a soul that loves God exult with gladness at hearing that it will soon be released from the prison of this earth, and go to enjoy God? "*While we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord.*"[4] While the soul is united to the body, it is at a distance from the vision of God, as if in a strange land, and excluded from its true country. Hence, according to St. Bruno, the departure of the soul from the body should not be called death, but the beginning of life.[5]

Hence, the death of the saints is called their birthday; because at death they are born to that life of bliss which will never end. St. Athanasius says: "To the just, death is only a passage to eternal life."[6] "O amiable death," says St. Augustins, "who will not desire

1 "Educ de custodia animam meam."—*Ps.* cxli. 8.

2 "Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine."—*Luke* ii. 29.

3 "Desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo."—*Phil.* i. 23.

4 "Dum sumus in corpore, peregrinamur a Domino."—2 *Cor.* v. 6.
"Mors dicenda non est, sed vitæ principium."—*De Virginit.*

6 Non est justis mors, sed translatio.

thee, who art the end of evils, the close of toils, the beginning of everlasting repose?"[1] Hence the holy Doctor frequently prayed for death, that he might see God.[2]

The sinner, as St. Cyprian says, has just reason to fear death; because he will pass from temporal to eternal death.[3] But he who is in the state of grace, and hopes to pass from death to life, fears not death. In the life of St. John the Almoner, we read that a certain rich man recommended to the prayers of the saint an only son, and gave the saint a large sum of money to be distributed in alms, for the purpose of obtaining from God a long life for his son. The son died soon after; but when the father complained of his death, God sent an angel to say to him: "You sought for your son a long life: he now enjoys eternal life in heaven." This is, as was promised by the Prophet Osee, the grace which Jesus Christ merited for us. *O death, I shall be thy death.*[4] By dying for us, Jesus has changed death into life. When Pionius, the Martyr, was brought to the stake, he was asked by those who conducted him, how he could go to death with so much joy. "You err," replied the saint: "I go not to death, but to life."[5] Thus, also, the mother of the youthful St. Symphorian exhorted him to martyrdom. "My son," said she, "life is not taken away from you; it is only exchanged for a better one."

[1] "O mors desiderabilis malorum finis, laboris clausula, quietis principium."—*De Vis. inf.*, l. 1, c 6.

[2] "Eja moriar Domine ut te videam."—*Sol. an. an. D.* c. 1.

[3] "Mori timeat qui ad secundam mortem, de hac morte transibit.'—*De Mortal.*

[4] "Ero mors tua, o mors!"—*Osee*, xiii. 41.

[5] "Erratis, non ad mortem, sed ad vitam contendo."—*Ap Eus* l. iv. c. 14.

Affections and Prayers.

O God of my soul! I have hitherto dishonored Thee by turning my back upon Thee; but Thy Son has honored Thee by offering to Thee the sacrifice of his life on the cross. Through the honor which Thy beloved Son has given Thee, pardon the dishonor which I have done Thee. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having offended Thee; and I promise henceforth to love nothing but Thee. From Thee I hope for salvation: whatever good is in me at present is the fruit of Thy grace; to Thee I ascribe it all. *By the grace of God, I am what I am.*[1] If I have hitherto dishonored Thee, I hope to honor Thee for eternity by blessing and praising Thy mercy forever. I feel a great desire to love Thee. This Thou hast given me: I thank Thee for it, O my love! Continue, continue the aid which Thou hast begun to give me. I hope to be henceforth Thine, and entirely Thine. And what greater pleasure can I enjoy than that of pleasing Thee, my Lord! who art so amiable, and who hast loved me so tenderly! O my God! I ask only love, love, love; and hope always to ask of Thee, love, love, until, dying in Thy love, I reach the kingdom of love, where, without evermore asking it, I shall be full of love, and never for a single moment cease to love Thee for all eternity, and with all my strength. Mary, my mother! who lovest thy God so intensely, and who desirest so vehemently to see him loved, obtain for me the grace to love him ardently in this life, that I may love him ardently forever in the next.

[1] "Gratia Dei sum id quod sum."—1 *Cor.* xv. 10

CONSIDERATION IX.

Peace of the Just at the Hour of Death.

"The souls of the just are in the hands of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; but they are in peace."—*Wis.* iii. 1, etc.

FIRST POINT.

The Just have nothing to fear at the Hour of Death.

The souls of the just are in the hands of God. If God holds fast in his hands the souls of the just, who can snatch them from him? It is true that hell does not cease to tempt and attack even the saints at the hour of death; but it also true that God does not cease to assist, and to multiply helps to his faithful servants, whenever their danger is increased. *There*, says St. Ambrose, *There is greater aid, where there is greater peril, because God is a helper in due time.*[1] David also assures us in the Psalms: *A helper in time of tribulation.*[2] The servant of Eliseus was struck with terror when he saw the city encompassed with enemies; but the saint inspired him with courage, saying: *Fear not: for there are more with us than with them.*[3] He then showed him an army of angels sent by God to defend the city. The devil will come to tempt the dying Christian; but his angel-guardian will come to strengthen him: his holy advocates will come—St.

[1] "Ibi plus auxilii, ubi plus periculi."—*De Jos. patr.* c. 5.

[2] "Dominus . . . adjutor in opportunitatibus."—*Ps.* ix. 10.

[3] "Noli timere, plures enim nobiscum sunt, quam cum illis."—4 *Kings*, vi. 16.

Michael, whom God has appointed to defend his faithful servants in their last combat with hell, will come; the divine Mother will come to chase away the devils, and to protect her servant; above all, Jesus Christ will come to guard against every temptation of hell, the innocent or penitent sheep for whose salvation he has given his life. He will give that confidence and strength of which the soul shall stand in need in that last struggle with its enemies. Hence, full of courage, it will say: *The Lord became my helper.*[1] *The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*[2] God, says Origen, is more solicitous for our salvation than the devil is for our perdition; for the Lord loves our souls far more than the devil hates them.[3]

God is faithful, says the Apostle; he does not permit us to be tempted above our strength.[4] But you will say: Many saints have died with great fear of being lost. I answer: We have but few examples of persons who, after leading a holy life, died with fears for their eternal salvation. Belluacensis says that, to purify them at the hour of death from some defect, God sometimes permits holy souls to be disturbed by such fears.[5] But generally the servants of God have died with a joyful countenance. At death the judgment of God excites fear in all; but if sinners pass from terror to despair, the saints rise from fear to confidence. St. Antonine relates that in a severe illness, St. Bernard trembled through fear of judgment, and was tempted to despair. But

[1] "Dominus factus est adjutor meus."—*Ps.* xxix. 11.

[2] "Dominus illuminatio mea et salus mea; quem timebo?"—*Ps.* xxvi. 1.

[3] "Major illi cura est, ut nos ad salutem pertrahat quam diabolo ut nos ad damnationem impellat."—*In Num. Hom.* 20.

[4] "Fidelis Deus non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis."—1 *Cor.* x. 13.

[5] "Justi quandoque dure moriendo purgantur in hoc mundo."—*Spec. mor.* l. 2. p. 1. d. 3.

thinking of the merits of Jesus Christ, he drove away all fear, saying to his Saviour: Thy wounds are my merits.[1] St. Hilarion also was seized with fear; but he said: "Go forth, my soul; what do you fear? For near seventy years you have served Christ; and are you now afraid of death?"[2] As if he said: My soul, what do you fear? have you not served a God who is faithful, and knows not how to abandon at death the Christian who has been faithful to him during life? Father Joseph Scamacca, of the Society of Jesus, being asked if in dying he felt confidence in God, said: "Have I served Mahomet, that I should now doubt of the goodness of my God, or of his desire to save me?"[3]

Should the thought of having offended God at some time of our life molest us at death, let us remember that he has protested that he forgets the iniquities of all penitent sinners. *If the wicked do penance,—I will not remember all his iniquities.*[4] But you may ask: How can I be secure of having received pardon from God? St. Basil asks the same question: "How can any one be certain that God has forgiven his sins?"[5] "He can be certain of pardon," answers the saint, "if he say: I have hated and abhorred iniquity."[6] He who detests sin, can rest secure of having obtained pardon from God. The heart of man cannot exist without loving some object; it must love creatures or God. If it loves not creatures, it loves God. And who are they that love God? All who observe his commands. *He that hath my com-*

[1] "Vulnera tua, merita mea."

[2] "Egredere, anima mea; quid times? Septuaginta prope annis cervisti Christo, et mortem times?"

[3] "Si impius egerit pœnitentiam, . . . omnium iniquitatum ejus . . . non recordabor."—*Ezek.* xviii 21.

[4] "Quomodo certo persuasus esse quis potest quod Deus ei peccata dimiserit?"

[5] "Nimirum si dicat; Iniquitatem odio habui et abominatus sum."—*Reg brev. interr* 12.

mandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.[1] He then who dies in the observance of the commandments, dies in the love of God; and he that loves fears not. *Charity casteth out fear.*[2]

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! when will the day arrive on which I can say: My God! I can never lose Thee? When shall I see Thee face to face, and be sure of loving Thee with all my strength for eternity? Ah, my Sovereign Good, my only love! as long as I have life, I shall be in danger of offending Thee and of losing Thy grace. There has been an unhappy time when I did not love Thee, but, on the contrary, despised Thy love. I am sorry for it with my whole soul, and hope that Thou hast already pardoned me. I now love Thee with my whole heart, and desire to do all in my power to love and please Thee. But I am still in danger of refusing Thee my love, and of again turning my back upon Thee. Ah, my Jesus, my life and my treasure! do not permit it. Should this misfortune ever happen to me, take me this moment out of life by the most cruel of deaths; I am content to suffer such a death, and I entreat Thee to send me such a death, sooner than permit me ever to cease to love Thee. Eternal Father! for the love of Jesus Christ, do not abandon me to so great an evil. Chastise me as Thou wishest, I deserve and accept any chastisement Thou pleasest to inflict upon me: but preserve me from the punishment of seeing myself deprived of Thy grace and of Thy love. My Jesus! recommend me to Thy Father. Mary, my Mother! recommend me to thy Son; obtain for me perseverance in his friendship, and the grace to love him; and then do with me what thou pleasest.

SECOND POINT.

The Just Die in a Sweet Peace.

The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the un-

[1] "Qui habet mandata mea et servat ea, ille est qui diligit me."—*John*, xiv. 21.

[2] "Charitas foras mittit timorem."—1 *John*, iv. 18.

wise they seemed to die; . . . but they are in peace.[1] In the eyes of the unwise the servants of God appear to die, as worldlings do, in sorrow and with reluctance. But God knows well how to console his children in their last moments; and even in the midst of the pains of death he infuses into their souls certain sweetnesses, as foretastes of Paradise, which he will soon bestow upon them. As they who die in sin begin to experience on the bed of death certain foretastes of hell, certain remorse, terrors, and fits of despair; so, on the other hand, the saints, by the frequent acts of divine love which they then make, by their ardent desire and firm hope of soon possessing God, begin to feel that peace which they will afterwards fully enjoy in heaven. To the saints death is not a punishment, but a reward. *When He shall give sleep to His beloved, behold the inheritance of the Lord.*[2] The death of the Christian that loves God is called, not death, but sleep, thus he shall be able to say less, *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest.*[3]

Father Suarez died with so much peace, that in his last moments he exclaimed: "I could never imagine that death would be so sweet."[4] When Cardinal Baronius was advised by his physician not to fix his thoughts so much on death, he said: "Perhaps you think I am afraid of death. I fear it not; but, on the contrary, I love it." In going to death for the faith, the Cardinal of Rochester, as Saunders relates, put on his best clothes, saying that he was going to a nuptial feast. Hence at the sight of the scaffold he threw away his staff, and said:

[1] "Justorum animæ in manu Dei sunt, et non tanget illos tormentum mortis; visi sunt oculis insipientium mori illi autem sunt in pace."—*Wis* iii. 1.

[2] "Cum dederit dilectis suis somnum, ecce hereditas Domini."—*Ps.* cxxvi. 2.

[3] "In pace in idipsum dormiam et requiescam."—*Ps.* iv. 9.

[4] Non putabam tam dulce esse mori.

"O my feet! walk fast; we are not far from Paradise."[1] Before death he intoned the "Te Deum," to thank God for giving him the grace to die a martyr for the holy faith; and, full of joy, he laid his head on the block. St. Francis of Assisi began to sing at the hour of death, and invited the brethren to join him. Brother Elias said to him: "Father, at death we ought rather to weep than to sing." "But," replied the saint, "I cannot abstain from singing; for I see that I shall soon go to enjoy my God." A young nun of the order of St. Teresa, in her last illness said to her sisters in religion who stood round her bed bathed in tears: "O God! why do you weep? I go to enjoy my Jesus. If you love me, rejoice with me."

Father Granada relates that a certain sportsman found a solitary infected with leprosy, singing in his last agony. "How," said the sportsman, "can you sing in such a state?" "Brother," replied the hermit, "between me and God there is nothing but the wall of this body. I now see that my flesh is falling off—that the prison will soon be destroyed, and that I shall go to see my God. It is for this reason that I rejoice and sing." The desire of seeing God made St. Ignatius the Martyr say that if the wild beasts should not take away his life he would provoke them to devour him.[2] St. Catharine of Genoa could not bear to hear death called a misfortune. Hence she would say: "Oh! beloved death, in what a mistaken light are you viewed! Why do you not come to me? I call on you night and day." St. Teresa desired death so vehemently that she regarded the continuation of life as death: hence she composed the celebrated hymn, *I die because I do not die.* Such is death to the saints.

[1] Ite, pedes; parum a paradiso distamus.

[2] Ego vim faciam ut devorer.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my supreme good, my God! if for the past I have not loved Thee, I now turn to Thee with my whole soul. I take leave of all creatures, and choose Thee, my most amiable Lord! for the sole object of my love. Tell me what Thou wishest from me: I will do all Thou desirest. I have offended Thee enough I wish to spend all the remaining moments of life in pleasing Thee. Give me grace to compensate by my love my past ingratitude, which has continued to this moment. I deserve to burn in the fire of hell for so many years; Thou hast sought after me, and hast drawn me to Thyself. Make me now burn with the fire of Thy holy love. I love Thee, O Infinite Goodness! Thou justly claimest all the affections of my heart; for Thou hast loved me more than all others have loved me. Thou alone deservest my love; Thou only do I wish to love. I desire to do everything in my power to please Thee. Do with me whatsoever Thou wishest. For me it is enough to love Thee and to be loved by Thee. Mary, my Mother! assist me; pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

The Just in Dying have a Foretaste of Celestial Joy.

And how can he fear death, says St. Cyprian, who hopes to receive a kingly crown in Paradise! "Let us not be afraid to be put to death when we are certain that we shall be crowned after death."[1] How can he fear death when he knows that by dying in the state of grace his body will become immortal? *This mortal must put on immortality.*[2] He that loves God and desires to see him, regards life as a punishment and death as a source of joy, says St. Augustine.[3] And St. Thomas of Villanova says that death, if it finds a man sleeping, comes like a

[1] "Non vereamur occidi, quos constet quando occidimur, coronari?" —*Epis. ad Thibar.*

[2] "Oportet . . . mortale hoc induere immortalitatem."—1 *Cor.* xv. 53.

[3] "Patienter vivit, delectabiliter moritur."—*In* 1 *Joh. tr.* 9.

thief, robs him, kills him, and casts him into the pit of hell. But if it finds him watching, it comes as an ambassador from God, and salutes him, saying: "The Lord expects you to the nuptial feast: come; I will conduct you to the happy kingdom for which you sigh."[1]

Oh! with joy does he expect death who finds himself in the grace of God, and hopes soon to see Jesus Christ, and to hear from him these consoling words: *Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many.*[2] Oh, what consolation will he then receive from his works of penance, his prayers, his detachment from earthly goods, and from all he has done for God! *Say to the just man, that it is well; for he shall eat the fruit of his doings.*[3] Then he who has loved God will taste the fruit of all his holy works. Hence, in hearing that a religious, his friend, died in sentiments of fervent piety, Father Hyppolitus Durazzo, of the Society of Jesus, wept not, but exulted with joy and gladness. But, says St. John Chrysostom, would it not be most unreasonable to believe that heaven is eternal, and to pity those who go to that kingdom of delights?[4] What special consolation will the just man receive at the hour of death from the devotions performed in honor of the Mother of God, from the Rosaries he has recited, from his visits to her image, from his fasts on Saturdays, from his frequent attendance at her Confraternities! Mary is called the faithful Virgin. Oh, how great is her fidelity in consoling her faithful servants at the hour of death! A certain person devoted to

[1] "Te Dominus ad nuptias vocat; veni, ducam te quo desideras."—*De S. Ildeph. conc.* 2.

[2] "Euge, serve bone et fidelis: quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam; intra in gaudium Domini tui."—*Matt.* xxv. 21.

[3] "Dicite justo quoniam *bene:* quoniam fructum adinventionum suarum comedet."—*Isa.* iii. 10.

[4] "Fateri cœlum et eos, qui hinc eo commearunt luctu prosequi."—*Ad Vid. jun. tr.* 1.

the Most Holy Virgin said in his last moments to Father Binetti: "Father, you cannot conceive the consolation which the thought of having served Mary infuses at the hour of death. O my Father! if you knew the happiness I feel on account of having served this Mother. I am not able to express it." How great will be the joy of him who has loved Jesus Christ—who has often visited him in the Most Adorable Sacrament, and has often received him in the Holy Communion, when he sees his Lord entering his room in the Most Holy Viaticum, and coming to accompany him in his passage to eternity! Happy he who will then be able, with St. Philip Neri, to say to his Saviour: "Behold my love! Behold my love! Give me my love."

But you will, perhaps, say: Who knows what shall be my lot? Who knows but I shall die an unhappy death? Of you who speak in this manner, I ask what is it that causes a bad death? Nothing but sin. We should then fear sin only, and not death. "It is clear," says St. Ambrose, "that it is not death that is bitter, but sin; our fears ought not to be of death, but of life."[1] If, then, you desire not to fear death, lead a holy life. *With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end.*[2]

Father Colombière held it to be morally impossible that the man who has been faithful to God during life should die a bad death. And before him, St Augustine said: "He who has lived well cannot die badly. He who is prepared to die fears no death, however sudden."[3] *The just man, if he be prevented with death, shall be in rest.*[4] Since we cannot go to enjoy God without passing through

[1] "Liquet acerbitatem non mortis esse, sed culpæ: non ad mortem metus referendus, sed ad vitam."—*De bon. mort.* c. 8.

[2] "Timenti Dominum bene erit in extremis."—*Ecclus.* i. 13.

[3] "Non potest male mori, qui bene vixerit."—*De Disc. chr.*, c. 12.

[4] "Justus autem, si morte præoccupatus fuerit, in refrigerio erit."—*Wis.* iv. 7.

death, St. John Chrysostom exhorts us to offer to God what we are obliged to give him.[1] And let us be persuaded that they who offer their death to God, make the most perfect act of divine love which it is in their power to perform; because, by cheerfully embracing that kind of death which God is pleased to send, and at the time and in the manner in which God sends it, they render themselves like the holy martyrs. He who loves God should desire and sigh after death; because it unites him forever to God, and delivers him from the danger of losing God. He who does not desire to see God speedily, and to be secure against the possibility of ever losing God, shows that he has but little love for God. Let us, during life, love him to the utmost of our power. We should make use of life only to advance in divine love: the measure of our love of God at death will be the measure of our love for him in a happy eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

My Jesus! bind me to Thyself so that I may never more be separated from Thee. Make me entirely Thine before I die, that I may see Thee appeased, O my Redeemer! the first time I behold Thee. Thou didst seek after me when I fled away from Thee: ah! do not cast me off, now that I seek after Thee. Pardon me all the offences I have given Thee. From this day I will think only of serving and loving Thee. Thou hast laid me under too many obligations; Thou hast not refused to give Thy blood and Thy life for the love of me. I would wish to be entirely consumed for the love of Thee. O God of my soul! I wish to love Thee ardently in this life, that I may love Thee ardently in the next. Eternal Father! draw my whole heart to Thee: detach it from earthly affections: wound and inflame my whole soul with Thy holy love. Through the merits of Jesus Christ, hear my prayers. Give me holy perseverance, and grant me the grace always to ask it of Thee. Mary, my Mother! assist me, and obtain for me the grace to ask unceasingly of thy Son the gift of holy perseverance.

[1] "Offeramus Deo quod tenemur reddere."—*Op. imp. in Matth. hom.* 25.

CONSIDERATION X.

Means of Preparing for Death.

"Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."—*Eccl.* vii. 40.

FIRST POINT.

Not to Wait till the Last Moment.

ALL confess that they must die, and die only once, and that nothing is of greater importance than to die well; because on death depends whether we shall be forever in bliss or forever in despair. All know that our eternal happiness or our eternal unhappiness depends on leading a good or a bad life. How then does it happen that the greater part of Christians live as if they were never to die, or as if to die well or ill were of little moment! They live in sin because they do not think of death. *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.*[1] We must be persuaded that the hour of death is not fit for settling the accounts of the soul, and securing the great affair of eternal salvation. In worldly matters prudent men take measures in due time to secure temporal gain—to obtain a situation of emolument. To preserve or restore bodily health the necessary remedies are not deferred a single moment. What would you say of the man who should put off his preparation for a trial on which his life depended till the day of trial arrived? Would you not stigmatize as a fool the general who should not begin to lay in a supply of provisions and arms till the city is

[1] "In omnibus operibus tuis memorare novissima tua, et in æternum non peccabis."—*Ecclus.* vii. 40.

besieged? Would it not be folly in a pilot to neglect till the time of the tempest, to provide the vessel with an anchor and a helm? Such precisely is the folly of the Christian who neglects to tranquillize his conscience till death arrives.

When sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction, as a tempest, then shall they call upon me, and I will not hear. . . . Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way."[1] The time of death is a time of storm and confusion. At that awful hour sinners call on God for assistance; but they invoke his aid through the fear of hell, which they see at hand, and not with true contrition of heart. It is for this reason that God is deaf to their cry; it is for this reason also that they will then taste the fruit of their wicked life. What they have sown they shall reap.[2] Ah! it will not then be enough to receive the sacraments; it is necessary at death to hate sin, and to love God above all things. But how can he, then, hate forbidden pleasures, who has loved them till that moment? How can he love God above all things, who has till then loved creatures more than he has loved God?

The Lord called the virgins foolish who wished to prepare their lamps when the bridegroom was nigh. All have a horror of a sudden death, because there is no time to settle the accounts of conscience. All confess that the saints have been truly wise, because they prepared for death during life. And what are we doing? Shall we expose ourselves to the danger of preparing for death when it arrives? We ought to do at present what we shall then wish to have done. Oh! what pain will then arise from the remembrance of time lost, and still more from the remembrance of time spent in sin: time

[1] "Cum . . . interitus quasi tempestas ingruerit . . ., tunc invocabunt me, et non exaudiam . . .; comedent fructus viæ suæ."—*Prov.* i. 27.

[2] "Quæ seminaverit homo, hæc et metet."—*Gal.* vi. 8.

given by God to merit eternal life; but now past, and never to return! What anguish will the sinner feel when he shall be told: You can be steward no longer![1] There is no more time for doing penance, for frequenting the sacraments, for hearing sermons, for visiting Jesus Christ in the Holy Sacrament, or for prayer. What is done is done. To make a good confession, to remove several grievous scruples, and thus tranquillize the conscience, would require a better state of mind and time more free from confusion and agitation. But time will be no more.[2]

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! had I died on one of the nights known to Thee, where should I be at present? I thank Thee for having waited for me; I thank Thee for all those moments which I should have spent in hell from the first moment that I offended Thee. Ah! give me light, and make me sensible of the great evil I have done Thee in voluntarily losing Thy grace, which Thou didst merit for me by the sacrifice of Thy life on the cross. Ah! my Jesus, pardon me: I am sorry from the bottom of my heart, and above all things, for having despised Thee, who art infinite goodness. Ah! assist me, O my Saviour! that I may never lose Thee again. Alas, my Lord! if I return again to sin, after so many lights and graces which Thou hast bestowed upon me, I should deserve a hell to be made on purpose for myself. Through the merits of that blood which Thou hast shed for my sake, do not permit me ever more to offend Thee. Give me holy perseverance, give me Thy love. I love Thee, and I will never cease to love Thee till death. My God, have mercy on me for the love of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my hope! do thou too have pity on me; recommend me to God: thy recommendations are never rejected by that God who loves thee so tenderly.

[1] "Jam non poteris amplius villicare."—*Luke*, xvi. 2.

[2] "Tempus non erit amplius."—*Apoc.* x. 6.

SECOND POINT.

Put Our Conscience in a Good State, and Regulate Our Lives.

Brother, since it is certain that you will die, go as soon as possible to the foot of the crucifix; thank your crucified Redeemer for the time which in his mercy he gives you to settle the affairs of your conscience; and then review all the irregularities of your past life, particularly of your youth. Cast a glance at the commandments of God: examine yourself on the duties of the state of life in which you have lived, and on the society you have frequented: mark down in writing the sins you have committed; make a general confession of your whole life, if you have not as yet made one. Oh! how much does a general confession contribute to regularity of life in a Christian! Consider that you have to settle accounts for eternity; and take care to adjust them as if you were on the point of rendering these accounts to Jesus Christ at judgment. Banish from your heart every sinful affection, and every sentiment of rancor; remove every ground of scruple on account of the injury done to the property or character of others, or of scandal to your neighbor; and resolve to fly from all those occasions in which you should be in danger of losing God. Remember that what now seems difficult will appear impossible at the hour of death.

It is still more important for you to resolve to practise the means of preserving your soul in the grace of God. These means are,—hearing Mass every day, the meditation on the eternal truths, the frequentation of the sacraments of penance and Eucharist at least every eight days, the visit every day to the Most Holy Sacrament, and to an image of the divine Mother, attendance at her confraternity, spiritual reading, examination of conscience every evening, some special devotion to the Blessed

Virgin, along with fasting every Saturday in her honor Above all, resolve to recommend yourself frequently to God and to the Blessed Virgin, and frequently to invoke, in the time of temptations, the sacred names of Jesus and Mary. These are the names by which you will be able to secure a happy death, and to obtain eternal life.

The practice of these means will be for you a great sign of your predestination. And as to the past, trust in the blood of Jesus Christ, who now gives you these lights, because he desires your salvation; and trust in the intercession of Mary, who obtains these lights for you. Oh! if you adopt this mode of life, and place great confidence in Jesus and Mary, what aid will you receive from God, and what strength will your soul acquire! Dearly beloved reader, give yourself then instantly to God, who invites you, and begin to enjoy that peace of which you have been hitherto deprived through your own fault. And what greater peace can a soul enjoy than to be able to say, in going to rest at night. Should death come this night, I hope to die in the grace of God! How happy the man who, amid the terrors of thunder or of earthquakes, is prepared to accept death with resignation, should God be pleased to send it!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord! with what fervor do I thank Thee for the light which Thou gavest me! I have so often abandoned Thee and turned my back upon Thee: but Thou hast not abandoned me. Hadst Thou abandoned me I should now be blind, as I have hitherto wished to be; I should be obstinate in my sins, and should not have the desire either to renounce sin or to love Thee. I now feel a great sorrow for having offended Thee, a great desire to be in the state of grace. I feel a hatred of these accursed delights which have made me lose Thy friendship. These sentiments are all graces which come from Thee, and make me hope that Thou wilt pardon and save me. Since, then,

after all my sins, Thou hast not abandoned me—since Thou now wishest to save me, behold, O Lord! I give myself entirely to Thee. I am sorry, above all things, for having offended Thee; and I propose to lose life a thousand times rather than forfeit Thy grace. I love Thee, O my sovereign Good! I love Thee, O my Jesus! who hast died for me; and I hope in Thy blood, that Thou wilt not permit me to be ever again separated from Thee. O my Jesus! I will never more lose Thee. I wish to love Thee always during life. I wish to love Thee at death. I wish to love Thee for all eternity. Preserve me then, O Lord! at all times, and increase my love for Thee. This favor I ask through Thy merits. Mary, my hope! pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

We must Detach Ourselves from the World.

It is also necessary to endeavor to be at all times in the state in which we desire to be at death. *Blessed are he dead who die in the Lord.*[1] St. Ambrose says that they die well who, at the hour of death, are found dead to the world; that is, detached from the goods from which death will separate us by force. We ought then, from this moment, to accept the spoliation of our goods, and the separation from relatives and from everything in this world. Unless we do it voluntarily during life, we shall have to do it through necessity at death, but with extreme pain and great danger of eternal perdition. Hence St. Augustine says, that to settle during life all temporal matters, and dispose by will of all the goods we shall have to bequeath, contribute greatly to a tranquil death; because when all worldly affairs are already adjusted, the soul may be entirely occupied in uniting itself to God. At that hour, we should think and speak only of God and of Paradise. These last moments are too precious to be squandered in earthly thoughts. At death is completed the crown of the elect; for it is

[1] "Beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur."—*Apoc.* xiv. 13.

then, perhaps, that they reap the greatest harvest of merits, by embracing, with resignation and love, death and all its pains.

But the Christian who has not been in the habit of exciting these sentiments during life, will not have them at the hour of death. Hence some devout souls, with great spiritual profit to themselves, are accustomed to renew every month, after being at confession and Communion, the Protestation of death along with the Christian acts, imagining themselves at the point of death, and to be near their departure from this world.[1] Unless you do this during life you will find it very difficult to do it at death. In her last illness, that great servant of God, Sister Catharine of St. Alberts, of the order of St. Teresa, sent forth a sigh, and said, "Sisters, I do not sigh through fear of death, for I have lived for twenty-five years in expectation of it; but I sigh at the sight of so many deluded Christians, who spend their life in sin, and reduce themselves to the necessity of making peace with God at death, when I can scarcely pronounce the name of Jesus."

Examine then, O my brother, if you are now attached to anything on this earth, to any person, to any honor, to your house, to your money, to conversations or amusements; and reflect that you are not immortal. You must one day, and perhaps very soon, take leave of them all. Why then do you cherish any attachment to them, and thus expose yourself to the risk of an unhappy death? Offer from this moment all to God: tell him you are ready to give up all things whenever he pleases to deprive you of them. If you wish to die with resignation you must from this moment resign yourself to all the contradictions and adversities which may happen to you, and must divest yourself of all affections to earthly

[1] The formula of this PROTESTATION is to be found at the end of the volume.

things. Imagine yourself on the bed of death, and you will despise all things in this world. "He," says Jerome, "who always thinks that he is to die, easily despises all things."[1]

If you have not yet chosen a state of life, make choice of that state of life which at death you will wish to have selected, and which will make you die with greater peace. If you have already made choice of a state of life, do now what at death you will wish to have done in that state. Spend every day as if it were the last of your life; and perform every action, every exercise of prayer, make every confession and Communion, as if they were the last of your life. Imagine yourself every hour at the point of death, stretched on a bed, and that you hear that *Proficiscere de hoc mundo* which announces your departure from this world. Oh! how powerfully will this thought assist you to walk in the way of God, and to detach your heart from this earth! *Blessed is that servant whom, when his Lord shall come, he shall find him so doing.*[2] He who expects death every hour will die well, though death should come suddenly upon him.

Affections and Prayers.

Every Christian ought to be prepared to say at the moment the news of death is announced to him: Then, my God, only a few hours remain; during the short remainder of the present life, I wish to love Thee to the utmost of my power, that I may love Thee more perfectly in heaven. But little remains for me to offer to Thee. I offer Thee these pains, and the sacrifice of my life in union with the sacrifice which Jesus Christ offered for me on the Cross. Lord! the pains which I suffer are few and light compared with what I have deserved; such as they are, I embrace them as a mark of the love which I bear Thee. Pro-

[1] "Facile contemnit omnia, qui se semper cogitat esse moriturum."—*Ep. ad Paulin.*

[2] "Beatus ille servus, quem, cum venerit Dominus ejus, invenerit sic facientem."—*Matt.* xxiv. 46.

vided I am to love Thee for eternity, I resign myself to all the punishments which Thou wishest to send me in this or the next life. Chastise me as much as Thou pleasest, but do not deprive me of Thy love. I know that, on account of having so often despised Thy love, I deserved never more to love Thee; but Thou canst not reject a penitent soul. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having offended Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart, and place all my trust in Thee. Thy death, O my Redeemer! is my hope. To Thy wounded hands I recommend my soul. *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, the God of Truth.*[1] O my Jesus, Thou hast given Thy blood for my salvation: do not suffer me to be separated from Thee. I love Thee, O eternal God, and hope to love Thee for eternity. Mary, my Mother, assist me at the awful moment of death. To thee I now consign my spirit; to thee I recommend myself. Deliver me from hell.

[1] "In manus tuas commendo, spiritum meum; redemisti me, Domine Deus veritatis."—*Ps.* xxx. 6.

CONSIDERATION XI.

Value of Time.

"Son, observe the time."—*Ecclus.* iv. 23.

FIRST POINT.

Time is a Treasure of the Earth.

Son, says the Holy Ghost, be careful to preserve time, which is the greatest and the most precious gift which God can bestow upon you in this life. The very pagans knew the value of time. Seneca said that no price is an equivalent for it."[1] But the saints have understood its value still better. According to St. Bernardine of Sienna, a moment of time is of as much value as God; because in each moment a man can, by acts of contrition or of love, acquire the grace of God and eternal glory.[2]

Time is a treasure which is found only in this life; it is not found in the next, either in hell or in heaven. In hell the damned exclaim with tears: Oh! that an hour was given to us![3] They would pay any price for an hour of time, in which they might repair their ruin: but this hour they will never have. In heaven there is no weeping; but, were the saints capable of weeping, all their tears would arise from the thought

[1] "Nullum temporis pretium."—*De Brev. vit.* c. 8.

[2] "Modico tempore potest homo lucrari gratiam et gloriam. Tempus tantum valet, quantum Deus, quippe tempore bene consumpto comparatur Deus."

[3] "O, si daretur hora!"

of having lost the time in which they could have acquired greater glory, and from the conviction that this time will never again be given to them. A deceased Benedictine nun appeared in glory to a certain person, and said that she was perfectly happy, but that if she could desire anything, it would be to return to life, and to suffer pains and privations in order to merit an increase of glory. She added, that, for the glory which corresponds to a single *Ave Maria*, she would be content to endure till the day of judgment the painful illness which caused her death.

My brother, how do you spend your time? Why do you always defer till to-morrow what you can do to-day? Remember that the time which is past is no longer yours: the future is not under your control: you have only the present for the performance of good works. "Why, O miserable man," says St. Bernard, "do you presume on the future, as if the Father had placed time in your power?"[1] St. Augustine asks: "How can you, who are not sure of an hour, promise yourself to-morrow?"[2] If then, says St. Teresa, you are not prepared for death to-day, tremble lest you die an unhappy death.

Affections and Prayers.

O my God! I thank Thee for the time which Thou givest me to repair the disorders of my past life. Were I to die at this moment, the remembrance of the time I have lost should be one of my greatest torments. Ah, my Lord! Thou hast given me time to love Thee, and I have spent it in offending Thee. I deserve to be sent to hell from the first moment in which I turned my back upon Thee; but Thou hast called me to repentance, and hast pardoned me. I promised to offend Thee no more: but how often have I returned to sin? how often hast Thou pardoned my ungrateful relapses? Blessed forever be Thy

[1] "Quid de futuro, miser, præsumis, tamquam Pater tempora in tua posuerit potestate?"—*De Cont. Mund.* c. 16.

[2] Diem tenes, qui horam non tenes?

mercy! If it were not infinite, how couldst Thou have had so much patience with me? Who could have borne with me so long? Oh! how sorry do I feel for having offended so good a God! My Saviour! the patience alone with which Thou didst wait for me ought to enamour me of Thee. Ah! do not suffer me to live any longer ungrateful to the love Thou hast had for me. Detach me from every creature, and draw me entirely to Thyself. O my God! I will no longer dissipate the time Thou givest me to repair the evil that I have done; I will spend it all in serving and loving Thee. Give me holy perseverance. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness, and hope to love Thee for eternity. I thank thee, O Mary! by thy advocacy thou hast obtained for me this time which is given to me. Assist me now, and obtain for me the grace to spend it all in loving thy Son, my Redeemer, and in loving thee, my queen and my mother.

SECOND POINT.

Neglect of Time.

There is nothing more precious than time; but there is nothing less esteemed and more despised by men of the world. This is what St. Bernard deplores when he says: Nothing is more precious than time, but nothing is regarded more cheaply."[1] The same saint adds: "The days of salvation pass away, and no one reflects that the day which has passed away from him can never return."[2] You will see a gambler spend nights and days in play. If you ask him what he is doing, his answer is: I am passing the time. You will see others standing several hours in the street, looking at those who pass by, and speaking on obscene or on useless subjects. If you ask them what they are doing, they will say: We are passing the time. Poor blind sinners! who lose so many days; but days which never return.

O time despised during life! you will be ardently de-

[1] Nihil pretiosius tempore sed nihil vilius æstimatur.

[2] Transeunt dies salutis, et nemo recogitat; nemo sibi non reditura momenta periisse causatur."—*De Cont. mundi*, c. 16.

sired by worldlings at the hour of death. They will then wish for another year, another month, another day; but they will not obtain it: they will then be told that time shall be no longer. How much would they then pay for another week, or another day, to settle the accounts of their conscience? To obtain a single hour, they would, says St. Laurence Justinian, give all their wealth and worldly possessions.[1] But this hour shall not be given. The assisting priest shall say to the dying sinner: Hasten, hasten your departure from this world; for your time is no more.

The prophet exhorts us to remember God, and to procure his friendship, before the light fails. *Remember Thy Creator . . . before the sun and the light be darkened.*[2] How great the distress and misery of a traveller who, when the night has come, perceives that he has missed the way, and that there is no time to correct the mistake. Such at death will be the anguish of the sinner who has lived many years in the world, and has not spent them for God. *The night cometh, when no man can work.*[3] For him, death shall be the night in which he will be able to do nothing. *He hath called against me the time.*[4] Conscience will then remind the worldling of all the time that God gave him, and that he has spent in the destruction of his soul; of all the calls and graces that he has received from God for his sanctification, and that he has voluntarily abused. The sinner will then see that the way of salvation is closed forever. Hence he will weep and say: O fool that I have been! O time lost! O life misspent! O lost years, in which I could have, but

[1] "Mundi substantiam, honorem, voluptates, pro unius horæ spatio, commutarent."—*De Vit. sol.* c. 10.

[2] "Memento Creatoris tui . . . antequam tenebrescat sol et lumen."—*Eccles.* xii. 1.

[3] "Venit nox quando nemo potest operari."—*John*, ix. 4.

[4] "Vocavit adversum me tempus."—*Lament.* i. 15.

have not, become a saint! And now the time of salvation is gone forever. But, of what use are these sighs and lamentations, when the scene is about to close,—the lamp on the point of being extinguished,—and when the dying sinner has reached that awful moment on which eternity depends?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! Thou hast spent Thy whole life for the salvation of my soul. There has not been a single moment of Thy life in which Thou hast not offered Thyself to the eternal Father to obtain for me pardon and eternal glory. I have been so many years in the world, and how many of them have I hitherto spent for Thee? Ah! all that I remember to have done produces remorse of conscience. The evil has been great, the good very little, and all full of imperfections and tepidity, of self-love and distractions. Ah, my Redeemer! all this has arisen from my forgetfulness of what Thou hast done for me. I have forgotten Thee, but Thou hast not forgotten me; when I fled from Thee, Thou didst follow me, and call me so often to Thy love. Behold me, O Jesus! I will resist no longer. Shall I wait till Thou abandon me? I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having separated myself from Thee by sin. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! worthy of infinite love. Ah! do not permit me ever again to lose this time, which Thou in Thy mercy givest me. Ah! remind me always, O my beloved Saviour! of the love Thou hast borne me, and of the pains Thou hast endured for me. Make me forget all things, that, during the remainder of my life, I may think only of loving and pleasing Thee. I love Thee, my Jesus, my love, my all! I promise, whenever Thou remindest me, to make acts of love. Give me holy perseverance. I place all my confidence in the merits of Thy blood. I also trust in thy intercession, O my dear Mother, Mary!

THIRD POINT.

We must Profit by the Time.

Walk whilst you have light.[1] We must walk in the way of the Lord during life, now that we have light; for, at the hour of death this light is taken away. Death is not the time for preparing, but for finding ourselves prepared. *Be ye ready.* At the hour of death we can do nothing: what is then done is done. O God! were a person told that in a short time a trial should take place, on which would depend his life and his entire property, with what haste would he seek an able counsel to plead his cause! how little time would he lose in adopting every means of securing a favorable result! And what are we doing? We know for certain that the most important of all causes—the affair of eternal salvation—will soon be decided; the decision may take place every hour, and still we lose time.

Some may say: I am young; I will hereafter give myself to God. But remember that, as the Gospel remarks, the Lord cursed the fig-tree the first time he found it without fruit, although the season for figs had not arrived. By this Jesus Christ wished to signify that men should at all times, even in youth, bring forth fruits of good works; otherwise they will be accursed, and will never more bring forth fruit. *May no man hereafter eat fruit of thee any more forever.*[2] Such the malediction of the Redeemer on the fruitless fig-tree; such is his malediction against all who resist his calls. Satan regards the whole time of our life as short, and, therefore, in tempting us he loses not a moment. *The devil is come*

[1] "Ambulate dum lucem habetis."—*John*, xii. 35.

[2] "Jam non amplius in æternum ex te fructum quisquam manducet."—*Mark*, xi. 14.

down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.[1] Then the devil loses no time in seeking our perdition; and shall we lose the time given to us to secure our salvation?

Some will say, What evil am I doing? O God, is it not an evil to lose time in gaming, in useless conversations, which are unprofitable to the soul? Does God give you time, that you may squander it? No: the Holy Ghost says, *Defraud not thyself of the good day, and let not the part of a good gift overpass thee.*[2] The workmen mentioned by St. Matthew, though they did no evil, but only lost time, were rebuked by the master of the vineyard. *Why stand ye here all the day idle?*[3] On the day of judgment Jesus Christ will demand an account of every idle word All the time that is not spent for God is lost time. "Believe," says St. Bernard, "that you have lost all the time in which you have not thought of God."[4] Hence the Holy Ghost says, *Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly, for neither work nor reason shall be in hell, whither thou art hastening*[5] The Venerable Sister Jane of the Most Holy Trinity, of the Order of St. Teresa, used to say that, in the lives of the saints, there is no to-morrow. To-morrow is found in the lives of sinners, who always say, Hereafter, hereafter; and in this state they continue till death. *Behold, now is the acceptable time.*[6] *To-day, if you shall hear his voice, harden not*

[1] "Descendit diabolus ad vos habens iram magnam, sciens quod modicum tempus habet."—*Apoc.* xii. 12.

[2] "Particula boni doni non te prætereat."—*Ecclus.* xiv. 14.

[3] "Quid hic statis tota die otiosi?"—*Matt.* xx. 6.

[4] Omne tempus in quo de Deo non cogitas, hoc te computes perdidisse."—*Medit.* c. 6

[5] "Quodcunque facere potest manus tua, instanter operare; quia nec opus, nec ratio . . . erunt apud inferos quo tu properas."—*Eccles.* ix 10.

[6] "Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile."—2 *Cor.* vi. 2.

your hearts.[1] If God call you to-day to do good, do it; for to-morrow it may happen that for you time will be no more, or that God will call you no more.

If you have hitherto spent the time in offending God, endeavor, like King Ezechias, to weep, during the remainder of your life, over your misspent years. *I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul.*[2] God spares your life, that you may repair the time you have lost.[3] In explaining this passage, St. Anselm says: "You will redeem the time if you do what you have neglected to do."[4] Of St. Paul, St. Jerome says that, though the last of the apostles, he was, on account of his great labors after he was called, the first in merits. Let us reflect that at each moment of time we may acquire new treasures of eternal riches. Were all the land round which you could walk, or all the money which you could count in a day, promised to you, would you not hasten to walk over the ground, or to count the money? At each moment you can acquire eternal treasures: will you, notwithstanding, squander your time? Say not what you can do to-day you will be able to do to-morrow; for this day will then be lost, and never return. When his companions spoke of the world, St. Francis Borgia conversed with God by holy affections; and so recollected was he, that when his opinion was asked on the subject of conversation, he knew not what to answer. Being corrected for this, he said: "I would rather be regarded stupid and unlearned, than lose time."

[1] "Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra."—*Ps.* xciv. 8.

[2] "Recogitabo tibi omnes annos meos in amaritudine animæ meæ.'—*Isa.* xxxviii. 15.

[3] "Redimentes tempus quoniam dies mali sunt."—*Eph.* v. 16.

[4] Tempus redimes, si, quæ facere neglexisti, facis.

Affections and Prayers.

No, my God, I will no longer lose the time which Thou in Thy mercy givest me. I should at this hour be in hell weeping without fruit. I thank Thee for having preserved my life: I wish during the remainder of my days to live only for Thee. Were I now in hell I should weep in despair, and without profit: I will now bewail the offences I have offered to Thee: and if I weep over them, I know for certain that Thou wilt pardon me. Of this the prophet assures me: *Weeping, thou shalt not weep; He will surely have pity on thee.*[1] Were I in hell, I could never more love Thee; and now I love Thee, and hope always to love Thee. Were I in hell, I could ask no more graces; but now I hear Thee say: *Ask, and ye shall receive* Since, then, I still have time to ask Thy graces, O God of my soul! I ask two graces: give me perseverance in Thy grace; give me Thy love; and then do with me what Thou pleasest; grant that in all the remaining moments of my life I may always recommend myself to Thee, saying: Lord! assist me; have mercy on me; grant that I may never more offend Thee; make me love Thee. Most Holy Mary, my Mother! obtain for me the grace always to recommend myself to God, and to ask him for perseverance and for his holy love.

[1] "Plorans nequaquam plorabis, miserans miserebitur tui."—*Isa.* xxx. 19.

CONSIDERATION XII.

The Importance of Salvation.

"But we entreat ye, brethren, . . . that you attend to your own business."—1 *Thess.* iv. 10, 11.

FIRST POINT.

Salvation is our own most important Affair.

THE business of eternal salvation is to us the most important of all affairs; but it is also the most neglected by Christians. They are diligent, and lose no time in seeking to gain a lawsuit, or a situation of emolument. How many measures taken to attain these objects? How many means adopted? They neither eat nor sleep. And what efforts do they make to secure their eternal salvation? How do they live? To save their souls, the greater number of Christians do nothing; on the contrary, they do everything to bring their souls to perdition; they live as if death, judgment, hell, heaven, and eternity were not truths of faith, but fables invented by the poets. If a person lose a lawsuit, or a harvest crop, how great is his pain and distress of mind? With what zeal does he labor to repair the loss? If worldlings lose a horse, or a dog, with what diligence do they seek after it? But if they lose the grace of God, they sleep, and jest, and laugh. All blush at being told that they neglect their worldly affairs, but how few are ashamed to neglect the business of eternity, which is the most important of all. The worldling says that the saints were truly wise, because they sought only the salvation of their souls; and

still he attends to all worldly business, but utterly neglects the concerns of the soul. *Brethren*, says St. Paul, *let the great business of your eternal salvation be the sole object of all your care.*[1] This is to you the most important of all affairs. Let us then be persuaded that eternal salvation is for us the most *important* affair,—the *only* affair,—and that if once neglected it is an irreparable affair if we ever make a mistake.

It is the most *important* affair, because if the soul be lost, all is lost. We ought to set a higher value on the soul than on all the goods of the earth. "The soul," says St. Chrysostom, "is more precious than the whole world!"[2] To be convinced of this truth, it is enough to know that God himself has condemned his Son to death in order to save our souls. The Eternal Word has not refused to purchase them with his own blood.[3] Hence a holy Father says that man appears to be of as much value as God.[4] Hence Jesus Christ has asked: *What exchange shall a man give for his soul?*[5] *For God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son.*[6] If then such is the value of the soul, for what earthly good shall a man exchange and lose it?

St. Philip Neri with reason could say that he who does not attend to the salvation of his soul is a fool. Were there on this earth two classes of men, one mortal and the other immortal, and were the former to see the latter seeking after the things of this world, its honors, goods, and amusements, they should certainly exclaim: O fools

[1] Rogamus vos . . . ut vestrum negotium agatis.

[2] "Anima est toto mundo pretiosior."—*In. 1 Cor.* hom. 3.

[3] "Empti enim estis pretio magno."—1 *Cor.* vi. 20.

[4] "Tam copioso munere humana redemptio agitur, ut homo Deum valere videatur."—*De dilig. D. c.* 6.

[5] "Quam dabit homo commutationem pro anima sua?"—*Matt.* xvi. 26.

[6] "Sic Deus dilexit mundum, ut Filium suum unigenitum daret."—*John*, iii. 16.

that you are! you have it in your power to acquire eternal riches, and do you fix your thoughts on those miserable and transitory things? Will you, for these, condemn yourselves, to an eternity of torments in the next life? Leave us, for whom all shall end at death, to seek after these earthly goods. But no; we are all immortal. How then does it happen that so many lose their souls for the miserable pleasures of this life? How does it come to pass, says Salvian, that Christians believe in judgment, hell, and eternity, and still live as if they feared them not?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! how have I spent so many years, which Thou hast given me in order to secure my eternal salvation? Thou, my Redeemer, hast purchased my soul with Thy blood, and hast consigned it to me that I might attend to its salvation; and I have labored only for its perdition by offending Thee who hast loved me so tenderly. I thank Thee for giving me time to be able to repair the great loss which I have suffered. I have lost my soul and Thy grace. Lord! I am sorry with my whole heart for my past offences, and I resolve, henceforth, to lose everything, even my life, rather than forfeit Thy friendship. I love Thee above all things, and I resolve always to love Thee, my Sovereign Good! who art worthy of infinite love. Assist me, my Jesus, that this purpose may not be like my past resolutions, to which I have been always unfaithful. Take me out of life rather than suffer me ever again to offend Thee, or ever to cease to love Thee. O Mary, my hope, after Jesus! save me by obtaining for me holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

Salvation is our only Affair.

The affair of eternal salvation is not only the most important, but it is the only affair to which we have to attend in this life. One thing is necessary.[1] St. Bernard

[1] "Porro unum est necessarium."—*Luke*, x. 42.

weeps over the blindness of Christians, who call the occupations of children trifles, and their own employments business. If the amusements of children be trifles, the employments of men are still greater follies. *What*, says the Redeemer, *will it profit us to gain the whole world if we lose our souls?*[1] My brother, if you save your soul, it will do you no harm to have lived here in poverty, afflictions, and contempt; for then you will have no more sorrows, and you will be happy for all eternity. But if you lose your soul, what will it profit you, in hell, to have indulged in all the amusements of the world, and to have enjoyed its riches and honors? If the soul be lost, amusements, riches, and honors, are lost—all is lost.

What answer will you give on the day of account? Were a king to send an ambassador to a city to transact some important business, and were the legate, instead of attending to the charge intrusted to him, to spend all his time in banquets, comedies, and festivities, and thus injure the rights of his master, what account would the sovereign demand of him at his return? But, O God! how strict must be the account which the Lord will exact of him who, after being placed in this world, not to indulge in amusements, nor to acquire wealth and dignity, but to save his soul, has attended to everything except to his own salvation? Worldlings think of the present, but not of the future. St. Philip Neri conversing one day in Rome with Francis Zazzera, a young man of talent, who was attached to the world, said to him: "You will realize a great fortune; you will be a prelate, afterward, perhaps, a cardinal, and perhaps even Pope. But what must follow? what must follow? Go," said the saint, "and meditate on these last words." Francis went home, and after reflecting on the words

[1] "Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur?"—*Matt.* xvi. 26.

what must follow? what must follow? he abandoned his secular pursuits, left the world, entered into the Congregation of St. Philip, and began to attend only to God.

It is our only affair, because we have but one soul. A prince asked, through his ambassador, a favor of Benedict XII., which could not be granted without sin. In answer, the Pope said—"Tell the prince that if I had two souls, I might, perhaps, lose one of them for him, and reserve the other for myself; but since I have but one, I cannot and will not lose it." St. Francis Xavier used to say that there is but one good and one evil in the world: the former consists in the salvation of the soul, the latter in its damnation. St. Teresa used frequently to say to her nuns—"One soul, one eternity." As if she said—One soul; if this be lost, all is lost; one eternity—the soul, if lost once, is lost forever. Hence David said—*One thing have I asked of the Lord: this I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord.*[1] Lord, I ask but one favor—save my soul, and I ask nothing else.

With fear and trembling work out your salvation.[2] He that does not fear and tremble for his salvation will not be saved: to save the soul, it is necessary to labor, and to do violence to nature. *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.*[3] To obtain eternal glory, our life must be found at death conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. Hence we must be careful, on the one hand, to avoid the occasions of sin; and, on the other, to adopt the means necessary for the attainment of eternal life. All would wish to be saved without trouble. "The devil," says St. Augustine, "sleeps not.

[1] "Unam petii a Domino, hanc requiram, ut inhabitem in domo Domini."—*Ps.* xxvi. 4.

[2] "Cum metu et tremore vestram salutem operamini."—*Phil.* ii. 12.

[3] "Regnum cœlorum vim patitur et violenti rapiunt illud."—*Matt* xi. 12.

but labors strenuously for your perdition: and will you slumber when your eternal happiness is at stake?"[1]

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! I thank Thee, for making me now remain at Thy feet and not in hell, which I have so often deserved. But of what use would the life which Thou hast preserved be to me, should I continue to live without Thy grace. Ah! may this never be! I have turned my back upon Thee; I have lost Thee, O my Sovereign Good! I am sorry for it with my whole heart. Oh, that I had died a thousand times, rather than have offended Thee! I have lost Thee; but the prophet tells me that Thou art all goodness, and that Thou art easily found by the soul that seeks Thee. If I have hitherto fled away from Thee, I now seek Thee, and seek nothing but Thee. I love Thee with all the affections of my heart. Accept me. Do not disdain to give Thy love to a soul that has at one time despised Thee. Teach me what I must do in order to please Thee; I am ready and willing to do it. Ah, my Jesus! save this soul, for which Thou hast given Thy blood and Thy life; and, in order to save me, give me the grace always to love Thee in this and in the next life. This grace I hope for through Thy merits. For this I also hope, O Mary! through thy intercession.

THIRD POINT.

A Failure in Saving One's Soul is an Irremediable Evil.

Important affair! *only* affair! *irreparable* affair! No error, says St. Eucherius, can be compared with the error of neglecting eternal salvation. For all other errors there is a remedy: if you lose property in one way, you may recover it in another; if you lose a situation, there may be some means of afterwards regaining it; if you soon lose your life, provided your soul be saved, all is safe. But if you lose your soul the loss is irreparable. Death happens but once; the soul, if once lost, is lost forever. Nothing remains but to weep for eternity with the other

[1] "Vigilat hostis, dormis tu?"—*In Ps.* 65.

miserable wretches in hell, where their greatest torment consists in the conviction, that the time of repairing their ruin is gone forever. *The summer is over, and we are not saved.*[1] Ask the worldly wise who are now in the pit of fire, what are their present sentiments; ask them if, now that they are condemned to that eternal prison, they feel happy at having made a fortune in this life. Listen to their wailing and lamentation: *We have erred.*[2] But of what use is it to know their error, now that there is no remedy for their eternal damnation? Should a man who could have preserved his palace at a small expense find it in ruins, how great would be his pain in reflecting on his own negligence, and on the impossibility of repairing the evil!

The greatest torment of the damned consists in the thought of having lost their soul, and of being damned through their own fault. *Destruction is thy own, O Israel; thy help is only in me.*[3] St. Teresa says that if a person loses through his own fault a ring or even a trifle, his peace is disturbed; he neither eats nor sleeps. O God! how great will be the torture of the damned Christian when, on entering hell and finding himself shut up in that dungeon of torments, he reflects on his misfortune, and sees that for all eternity there will be no relief, no mitigation of pain! He will say, "I have lost my soul, paradise, and God; I have lost all forever! And why? Through my own fault."

But you will say—If I commit this sin, why should I not expect to escape damnation? I may still be saved. Yes; but you may also be damned: and it is more likely that you will be lost, for the Scriptures menace eternal woes to all obstinate traitors, such as you are in your

[1] "Finita est æstas, et nos salvati non sumus."—*Jer.* viii, 20.

[2] "Ergo erravimus."—*Wis.* v. 6.

[3] "Perditio tua, Israel; tantummodo in me auxilium tuum."—*Osee*, xiii. 9.

present dispositions. *Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord.*[1] *Woe to them, for they have departed from me.*[2] By committing this sin, you at least expose your eternal salvation to great danger. And is this an affair to be exposed to risk? There is not question of a house, of a villa, or of a situation: there is question, says St. John Chrysostom, of being sent into an eternity of torments, and of losing an eternity of glory. And will you risk on a *perhaps* this business of sovereign importance?

You say: Perhaps I shall not be lost: I hope that God will hereafter pardon me. But what happens in the mean time? You condemn yourself to hell. Tell me, would you cast yourself into a deep pool of water, saying, perhaps I shall not be drowned? Surely you would not: why then should you trust your eternal salvation to such a groundless hope, to a *perhaps*? Oh! how many has this accursed hope sent to hell! Do you not know that the hope of those who are obstinately determined to commit sin is not hope, but an illusion and presumption which move God not to mercy but to greater wrath? If you say that you are now unable to resist the temptation and passion to whose domination you submit, how will you resist them hereafter, when, by yielding to sin, your strength will not be increased, but greatly diminished? For, on the one hand, your own malice will render you more blind and obdurate; and, on the other, the divine helps will be withheld. Do you expect that the more you multiply sins and insults against God, the more abundantly he will pour upon you his lights and graces?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! remind me always of the death Thou hast suffered for me, and give me confidence. I tremble lest the devil should make me despair at death by bringing before my view

[1] "Væ, filii desertores, dicit Dominus."—*Isa.* xxx. 1.

[2] "Væ eis, quoniam recesserunt."—*Osee*, vii. 13.

the many acts of treason I have committed against Thee. How many promises have I made never more to offend Thee after the light Thou hast given me! and, after all my promises, I have, with the hope of pardon, again turned my back upon Thee. Then, have I insulted Thee because Thou didst not chastise me? My Redeemer! give me a great sorrow for my sins before I leave this world. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having offended Thee. I promised to die a thousand times rather than abandon Thee. But make me in the mean time feel that Thou hast said to me what Thou didst say to Magdalene—*Thy sins are forgiven thee*—by giving me, before death, a great sorrow for all my iniquities, otherwise I fear my death will be troubled and unhappy. *Be not Thou a terror to me; Thou art my hope in the day of affliction.*[1] O my crucified Jesus! be not a terror to me in my last moments. If I die before I have wept over my sins and have loved Thee, Thy wounds and Thy blood will inspire me with fear rather than with confidence. I do not ask of Thee consolations and earthly goods during the remainder of my life; I ask of Thee sorrow and love. O my dear Saviour! hear my prayer for the sake of that love which made Thee offer Thy life in sacrifice for me on Calvary. Mary, my Mother! obtain for me these graces, along with holy perseverance till death.

[1] "Non sis tu mihi formidini, spes mea tu in die afflictionis."—*Jer.* xvii. 17.

CONSIDERATION XIII.

The Vanity of the World.

"What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?' —Matt. xvi. 26.

FIRST POINT.

The Goods of this World are Useless.

An ancient philosopher called Aristippus was once shipwrecked, and lost all his goods. When he reached the shore, the people, through respect for his great learning, presented him with an equivalent of all he had lost. He wrote to his friends, exhorting them to imitate his example, and to seek only the goods which cannot be wrested from them by shipwreck. Now, our relatives and friends who are in eternity exhort us from the other world to attend only to the acquisition of goods which even death cannot take from us. Death is called *the day of destruction.*[1] It is the day of destruction, because on that day we shall lose all the goods of this earth—its honors, riches, and pleasures. Hence, according to St. Ambrose, we cannot call the things of this life our goods, because we cannot take them with us to eternity. Our virtues alone accompany us to the next life.[2]

What then, says Jesus Christ, does it profit us to gain the whole world, if, at death, by losing the soul, we lose all? Ah! how many young men has this great maxim

[1] "Dies perditionis."—*Deut.* xxxii. 35.

[2] "Non nostra sunt, quæ non possumus auferre nobiscum; sola virtus comes est defunctorum."—*In Luc.* l. 7.

sent into the cloister! how many anchorets has it sent to the desert! and how many martyrs has it encouraged to give their life for Jesus Christ! By this maxim St. Ignatius of Loyola drew many souls to God, particularly the soul of St. Francis Xavier, who was then in Paris, attached to the things of the world. "Francis," said the saint one day, "reflect that the world is a traitor, which promises but does not perform. And though it should fulfil all its promises, it can never content your heart. But let us grant that it did make you happy, how long will this happiness last? Can it last longer than your life; and after death what will you take with you to eternity? Where is the rich man that has ever brought with him a piece of money, or a servant to attend him? What king has ever carried with him a shred of the purple as a badge of royalty?" At these words St. Francis abandoned the world, followed St. Ignatius, and became a saint.

Solomon confessed that *whatsoever his eyes desired he refused them not;*[1] but, after having indulged in all the pleasures of this earth, he called all the goods of the world *vanity of vanities*—"vanitas vanitatum." Sister Margaret of St. Anne, a Discalced Carmelite, and daughter of the Emperor Rudolph the Second, used to say: "Of what use are kingdoms at the hour of death?" The saints tremble at the thought of the uncertainty of their eternal salvation. Father Paul Segneri trembled, and, full of terror, said to his confessor: "Father, what do you think—shall I be saved?" St. Andrew Avellino trembled, and, with a torrent of tears, said: "Who knows whether I shall be saved or lost?" St. Louis Bertrand was so much terrified by this thought, that, during the night, in a fit of terror, he sprang out of bed, saying: "Perhaps I shall be lost! And sinners, while

[1] "Omnia quæ desideraverunt oculi mei, non negavi eis."—*Eccles.* ii. 10.

they live in a state of damnation, sleep, and jest, and laugh!"

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Jesus, my Redeemer! I thank Thee for making me see my folly and the evil I have done in turning my back on Thee who hast given Thy blood and Thy life for me. Thou didst not deserve to be treated by me as I have treated Thee. Behold! if death now came upon me, what should I find but sins and remorse of conscience, which would make me die with great disquietude! My Saviour! I confess that I have done evil, and committed a great error in leaving Thee, my Sovereign Good! for the miserable pleasures of this world. I am sorry from the bottom of my heart. Ah! through the sorrow which killed Thee on the Cross, give me a sorrow for my sins, which will make me weep during the remainder of my life over the injuries I have done Thee. My Jesus! pardon me; I promise to displease Thee no more, and to love Thee forever. I am not worthy of Thy love, which I have hitherto so much despised. But Thou hast said that Thou lovest him who loves Thee. I love Thee; love me, then, O Lord! I do not wish to be any longer in enmity with Thee. I renounce all the grandeurs and pleasures of the world, provided Thou lovest me. Hear me, O my God! for the love of Jesus Christ. He entreats Thee not to banish me from Thy heart. To Thee I consecrate my whole being; to Thee I consecrate my life, my pleasures, my senses, my soul, my body, my will, and my liberty. Accept me; reject not my offering, as I have deserved for having so often refused Thy friendship; *cast me not away from Thy face.* Most holy Virgin, my Mother, Mary! pray to Jesus for me. In thy intercession I place unbounded confidence.

SECOND POINT.

The Goods of this World are Contemptible.

There is a deceitful balance in his hand.[1] We must weigh things in the balance of God, and not in the deceitful balance of the world. The goods of this life are miser-

[1] "In manu ejus statera dolosa."—*Osee*, xii. 7.

able goods; they do not content the heart; they soon end. *My days have been swifter than a post: they have passed by as ships carrying fruits.*[1] The days of our life pass and fly away; and of all the pleasures of this earth, what remains? They have passed like a ship, which leaves no trace behind. *As a ship that passeth through the waters, whereof, when it is gone by, the trace cannot be found.*[2] Ask so many of the rich and learned of the world, so many princes and emperors who are now in eternity, what they possess of all the pomps, and delights, and grandeur which they enjoyed in this life? They all answer, Nothing, nothing. "O man," says St. Augustine, "you attend to what he had here; but attend to what he brings with him."[3] "You," says the saint, "regard only the goods which the rich man possessed; but observe what he takes with him at death—a fetid body and a rag of a garment to rot with him."

After death the great ones of the world are spoken of for a little while; but they are soon forgotten. *Their memory hath perished with a noise.*[4] And if they have gone to hell, what do they do and say in that place of woe? They weep and say, *What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? all those things are passed away like a shadow.*[5] What have our pomps and riches profited us, now that they are passed away like a shadow, and for us nothing remains but eternal torments, wailing and despair?

The children of this world are wiser in their generation

[1] "Dies mei velociores fuerunt cursore; pertransierunt quasi naves poma portantes."—*Job*, ix. 25.

[2] "Tanquam navis quæ pertransit fluctuantem aquam, cujus, cum præterierit, non est vestigium invenire."—*Wis.* v. 10.

[3] "Quid hic habebat, attendis; quid secum fert, attende."—*Serm.* 13.

[4] "Periit memoria eorum cum sonitu."—*Ps.* ix. 7.

[5] "Quid nobis profuit superbia? aut divitiarum jactantia quid contulit nobis? transierunt omnia illa tanquam umbra."—*Wis.* v. 8.

than the children of light.[1] How prudent are worldlings in earthly affairs! What toil do they endure in order to obtain a situation, or to acquire an estate? With what care do they attend to the preservation of bodily health! They adopt the safest means; they select the best physicians, the best remedies, and the purest air. But how careless are they about the concerns of the soul! And it is certain that health, situations, and possessions will one day end; but the soul and eternity are everlasting. What do not the unjust, the vindictive, and voluptuous endure in order to attain their wicked objects? And will they refuse to suffer anything for the soul? O God! by the light of the death-candle, at that time of truth, worldlings know and confess their folly. Then they say, Oh, that I had left the world and led a life of sanctity! Pope Leo XI. said at the hour of death, "It were better for me to have been porter in my convent than to be Pope." Honorius III. also said in his last illness, "It would have been better for me to have remained in the kitchen of my monastery to wash the plates than to be chosen head of the Church." In his dying moments, Philip II., King of Spain, sent for his son, and throwing off his royal robes, showed him his breast eaten away by worms, and said to him, "Prince, behold how we die, and how the grandeurs of this world end. Oh," he exclaimed, "that I had been a lay-brother in some religious community, and had not been king!" He then ordered a cross to be fastened to his neck by means of a cord, and, having made all his arrangements for death, he said to his son: "I wished you to be present at this scene, that you may see how the world treats monarchs in the end. Their death is like that of the poorest peasant. In short, he who leads the most holy life is in the greatest favor with God." This same son, who was afterward Philip III., dying at the age of forty-

[1] "Filii hujus sæculi prudentiores filiis lucis sunt."—*Luke*, xvi. 8.

three years, said: "My subjects, in the sermon to be delivered at my funeral, preach nothing but this spectacle which you behold: say that to have been king serves at death but to excite regret and pain." He then exclaimed, "Oh, that I had never been a king! Oh, that I had lived in a desert to serve God! I should now go with greater confidence to present myself at his tribunal, and should not now find myself in so much danger of being damned forever." But these desires at the hour of death serve only to increase the anguish and despair of those who have not loved God. Then, says St. Teresa, "we should make no account of what ends with life; the true life consists in living in such a manner as not to have any reason to fear death." If then we wish to see the true value of earthly things, let us look at them from the bed of death and say, These honors, these amusements, these revenues will one day have an end; we ought then to labor to become saints, and rich in goods which will accompany us to the other world, and which will make us content and happy for all eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Redeemer! Thou hast suffered so many pains and ignominies for my sake; and I have loved the pleasures and vanities of this earth to such an excess, that, for the sake of them, I have often trampled on Thy grace. But, since Thou didst not cease to seek after me when I despised Thee, I cannot, O my Jesus! fear that Thou wilt now cast me away, when I seek and love Thee with my whole heart, and am more sorry for having offended Thee than I should be for having suffered every other misfortune. O God of my soul! from this day forward I wish never to offend Thee, even by a venial fault. Make known to me what is displeasing to Thee. I will not, for any earthly good, do what I know to be offensive to Thee. Make known to me what I must do in order to please Thee. I am ready to do it. I wish to love Thee with a true love. I embrace, O Lord! all the pains and crosses which may come to me from Thy hands give me the resignation I stand in need of: *here burn.*

here cut. Chastise me in this life, that in the next I may be able to love Thee for eternity. Mary, my Mother! to thee I recommend my soul! do not ever cease to pray to Jesus for me.

THIRD POINT.

We must Work for Heaven.

The time is short: it remaineth that . . . they that use this world, be as if they used it not; for the fashion of this world passeth away.[1] What is our life on this earth but a scene, which passes away and ends very soon? *The fashion of this world passeth away.*[2] "The world," says Cornelius à Lapide," is like a stage; one generation passes away, another comes." He who acts the part of a king, takes not the purple with him. Tell me, O villa, O house, how many masters have you had? When the comedy is over, the king is no longer king; the master ceases to be master. You at present are in possession of such a villa and palace; but death will come, and they will pass to other masters.

The affliction of an hour maketh one forget great delights.[3] The gloomy hour of death brings to an end and makes us forget all the grandeur, nobility, and pomp of the world. Casimir, king of Poland, while he sat at a table with the nobles of his kingdom, died in the act of raising a cup to take a draught; and the scene ended for him. In seven days after his election, the Emperor Celsus was killed, and the scene closed for Celsus. Ladislaus, king of Poland, in his eighteenth year, while he was preparing for the reception of his bride, the daughter of the king of France, was suddenly seized with a violent pain, which soon deprived him of life. Couriers were instantly

[1] "Tempus breve est: qui utuntur hoc mundo, tanquam non utantur; præterit enim figura hujus mundi."—1 *Cor.* vii. 29.

[2] Est mundus instar scenæ: "Generatio præterit, et generatio advenit"

[3] "Malitia horæ oblivionem facit luxuriæ magnæ."—*Ecclus.* xi. 29.

despatched to announce to her that the scene was over for Ladislaus, and that she might return to France. By meditating on the vanity of the world, Francis Borgia became a saint. At the sight of the Empress Isabella, who had died in the midst of worldly grandeur and in the flower of youth, he, as has been already said, resolved to give himself entirely to God. "Thus, then," he said, "end the grandeurs and crowns of this world: I will henceforth serve a master who can never die."

Let us endeavor to live in such a manner that what was said to the fool in the Gospel may not be said to us at the hour of death: *Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee: and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?*[1] Hence, the Redeemer adds: *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*[2] Again he tells you to acquire the riches, not of the world, but of God;—of virtues and merits, which are goods which shall remain with you for eternity in heaven. *Lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume.*[3] Let us then labor to acquire the great treasure of divine love. "What," says St. Augustine, "has the rich man, if he has not charity? What does the poor man want, if he has charity?"[4] If a man had all the riches in the world, and has not God, he is the poorest of men. But the poor man who possesses God, possesses all things. And who are they that possess God? *He*, says St. John, *that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him.*[5]

[1] "Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetunt a te; quæ autem parasti, cujus erunt?"—*Luke*, xii. 20.

[2] "Sic est, qui sibi thesaurizat et non est in Deum dives."—*Ibid.* 21.

[3] "Thesaurizate vobis thesauros in cœlo, ubi neque ærugo neque tinea demolitur."—*Matt.* vi. 20.

[4] "Dives, si charitatem non habet, quid habet? Pauper, si charitatem habet, quid non habet?"—*Serm.* 112, *E. B. app.*

[5] "Qui manet in charitate, in Deo manet, et Deus in eo."—1 *John* iv. 16.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! I do not wish that the devil should have any longer dominion over my soul: I wish that Thou alone be the lord and master of it. I will renounce all things in order to acquire Thy grace. I esteem it more than a thousand thrones and a thousand kingdoms. And whom shall I love but Thee, who art infinitely amiable, who art an infinite good, infinite beauty, bounty, and love? Hitherto I have abandoned Thee for the sake of creatures; this is, and always will be, to me a source of sorrow, which will pierce my heart with grief for having offended Thee, who hast loved me with so much tenderness. But since Thou hast favored me with so many graces, I can no longer bear to see myself without Thy love. O, my Lord! take possession of my whole will, and of all that I possess, and do with me what Thou pleasest. If I have hitherto been impatient under adversity, I ask pardon. O, my Lord! I will never complain of Thy arrangements; I know that they are all holy, all for my welfare. Treat me, O my God! as Thou wishest; I promise to be always content, always to thank Thee. Make me love Thee, and I ask no more. What goods, what honors, what world can I love? O God! O God! I wish only for God. Happy thou, O Mary! who didst love nothing in the world but God. Obtain for me the grace to imitate thee, at least during the remainder of my life. In thee I trust.

CONSIDERATION XIV.

Life is a Journey to Eternity.

"Man shall go into the house of his eternity."—*Eccl.* xii. 5.

FIRST POINT.

Man is a Traveller on Earth.

SEEING that on this earth so many miscreants live in prosperity, and that so many saints live in tribulations, the very Gentiles, by the sole aid of the light of nature, have known this truth,—that, since there is a just God, there must be another life, in which the wicked are punished and the good rewarded. But what the Gentiles learned by the light of reason, we Christians know by faith. *We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come.*[1] This earth is not our country; it is for us a place of passage, from which we shall soon go to the house of eternity. "Man shall go into the house of his eternity." The house, then, dear reader, which you inhabit, is not your house; it is a hospital, from which you will soon, and when you least expect, be dislodged. Remember that when the time of death has arrived, your dearest relatives will be the first to banish you from it; and what will be your true house? The house of your body will be a grave, in which it will remain till the day of judgment; but your soul will go to the house of eternity—either to heaven or to hell. St. Augustine tells

[1] "Non habemus hic manentem civitatem, sed futuram inquirimus." —*Heb.* xiii. 14.

you that you are a stranger, a traveller, a spectator.[1] It would be foolishness in a traveller to spend all his patrimony in purchasing a villa or a house in a country through which he merely passes, and which he must leave in a few days. Reflect, says the saint, that in this world you are only on a journey; fix not your affections on what you see; look and pass on, and labor to procure a good house, in which you will have to dwell forever.

Happy you, if you save your soul! Oh! how delightful is heaven! All the princely palaces of this world are but stables compared with the city of paradise, which alone can be called *the city of perfect beauty*. There you will have nothing to desire; for you will be in the society of the saints, of the divine Mother, and of Jesus Christ, and will be free from all fear of evil; in a word, you will live in a sea of delights, and in unceasing joy, which will last forever. *Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.*[2] This joy shall be so great, that at every moment for all eternity it will appear new. But unhappy you, if you are lost! You will be confined in a sea of fire and of torments, in despair, abandoned by all, and without God. And for how long? Perhaps, after the lapse of a hundred thousand years, your pains will have an end? A hundred and a thousand millions of years and ages will pass by, and your hell will always be at its commencement. What are a thousand years compared with eternity? Less than a day which is gone by. *A thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday, which is past.*[3] Would you wish to know the house which will be your dwelling for eternity? it will be that which you merit, and which you choose for yourself by your works.

[1] Hospes es, transis et vides.

[2] "Lætitia sempiterna super caput eorum."—*Isa.* xxxv. 10.

[3] "Mille anni ante oculos tuos, tamquam dies hesterna quæ præteriit."—*Ps.* lxxxix. 4.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, O Lord! behold the house which I have deserved by the life which I led. Alas! it is hell, in which, from the first sin I have committed, I ought to dwell, abandoned by Thee, and without having it ever in my power to love Thee. Blessed forever be Thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now gives me time to repair the evil I have done. O my God! I will no longer abuse Thy patience. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, not so much because I have merited hell, as because I have outraged Thy infinite goodness. Never more, my God! never more will I rebel against Thee; I desire death rather than offend Thee. O my Sovereign Good! were I now in hell, I could never love Thee, nor couldst Thou love me. I love Thee, and wish to be loved by Thee; this I do not deserve, but Jesus merits it, because he has offered himself to Thee in sacrifice on the cross, that Thou mightest be able to pardon and love me. Eternal Father! give me, then, for the sake of Thy Son, the grace to love Thee, and to love Thee intensely. I love Thee, O my Father! who hast given me Thy Son. I love Thee, O Son of God! who didst die for me. I love thee, O Mother of Jesus! who, by thy intercession, hast obtained for me time for repentance. O Mary! obtain for me sorrow for my sins, the love of God, and holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

Man can Secure Eternal Happiness.

If the tree fall to the south or to the north, in what place soever it shall fall there it shall be.[1] Wheresoever the tree of your soul will fall at death, there will it remain forever. There is no medium; you will be forever a king in heaven, or a slave in hell; forever in bliss, in an ocean of delights, or forever in despair in a pit of torments. In contemplating the fate of the rich glutton, who was esteemed happy in this world because he was rich, but

[1] "Si ceciderit lignum ad austrum aut ad aquilonem, in quocumque loco ceciderit, ibi erit."—*Eccles.* xi. 3.

was afterward confined in hell; and the condition of Lazarus, who was regarded to be miserable because he was poor, but was afterward raised to the glory of heaven, St. John Chrysostom exclaimed: "O unhappy felicity, which dragged the rich man to eternal misery! O happy infelicity, which brought the poor Lazarus to the happiness of eternity!"[1]

Of what use is it to torture yourself, as some do, saying: Who knows whether I am among the predestined or not? When the tree is cut down, where does it fall? It falls on the side to which it inclines. Brother, to what side do you incline? What sort of life do you lead? Labor always to incline to the south; preserve your soul in the grace of God; fly from sin, and thus you will save your soul, and will be predestined. And in order to avoid sin, keep always before your eyes the thought of eternity, which St. Augustine calls "the great thought."[2] This thought has led so many young men to abandon the world, and to live in deserts, in order to attend only to the care of the soul; and they have secured eternal life. And, now that they are saved, they will rejoice for all eternity at having sought during life nothing but the salvation of their souls.

Father M. Avila converted a certain lady, who lived at a distance from God, by saying to her: "Madam, reflect on these two words—always and never." In consequence of a thought which he had one day of eternity, Father Paul Segneri could not sleep for several nights; and from that day forward gave himself up to a more rigorous life. Drexelius relates that a certain bishop was encouraged to lead a holy life by the thought of eternity, and by repeating within himself, "I stand

[1] O infelix felicitas, quæ divitem ad æternam infelicitatem traxit! O felix infelicitas, quæ pauperem ad æternitatis felicitatem perduxit.

[2] Magna cogitatio.

every moment at the gate of eternity."[1] A certain monk shut himself up in a cave, and did nothing else but exclaim, *O eternity! O eternity!* "He who believes in eternity," said Father Avila, "and does not become a saint, should be confined in a madhouse."

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! have mercy on me. I know that in committing sin I condemned myself to an eternity of torments; and I have been content to resist Thy will, and to incur this punishment. Ah, my Lord! pardon me; I am sorry for my sins from the bottom of my heart. I do not wish ever more to oppose Thy holy will. How miserable should I be, hadst Thou taken me out of life during my career of sin! I should at this moment be condemned to remain forever in hell, to hate Thy will. But now I love it, and wish forever to love it. Teach me and give me strength henceforth to do Thy will. I will no longer resist Thee, O infinite Goodness! This grace only do I ask; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Enable me to do Thy will perfectly; and I ask nothing more. And what, O my God! dost Thou desire, but my welfare and my salvation? Ah, eternal Father! hear my prayer, for the love of Jesus Christ, who has taught me to pray continually to Thee. In his name I ask this grace—*thy will be done; thy will be done.* Happy me if I spend the remainder of my life and if I end my days doing Thy will. O Mary! happy thou, who hast always done the will of God perfectly! obtain for me, through thy intercession, the grace to do his will during the remainder of my life.

THIRD POINT.

Man shall go into the House of his Eternity.

"*Man shall go into the house of his eternity.*"[2] The prophet says *man shall go*, to show that each shall go to the house to which he wishes to go: he shall not be carried

[1] "Omni momento ad ostium æternitatis sto."—*De Damn. Reg.* c. 10. § 3.

[2] "Ibit homo in domum æternitatis suæ."

to it, but will go of his own accord. It is certain that God wills the salvation of all men, but he will not save us by force. He has placed before each of us life and death; whichsoever we choose, will be given us.[1] *That which he shall choose, shall be given him.*[2] Jeremias likewise says, that the Lord has given us two ways in which to walk; one the way of heaven, the other the way of hell. *Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.*"[3] The choice rests with us. But how will he who wishes to walk in the way of hell, be able to reach heaven? All sinners wish for salvation, and in the mean time they, by their own choice, condemn themselves to hell, with the hope of being afterward saved. But who, says St. Augustine, can be found so foolish as to take poison with the hope of escaping death?[4] And still so many Christians, so many fools, kill their souls by sin, saying: I will hereafter think of a remedy. O delusion, which has sent so many souls to hell!

Let us not be so foolish; let us reflect that eternity is at stake. In erecting a house in which he expects to live for the remainder of his life, a man spares no trouble in seeking a healthful site, and submits to great toil and fatigue in endeavoring to make the house commodious and airy. And why are men so careless when there is question of the house in which they must dwell for eternity? The business for which we labor, says St. Eucherius, is eternity; there is not question of a house more or less commodious, more or less airy; but there is question of being in a place full of delights, among the friends of God, or in a pit of all torments, in the midst of an infamous crowd of abandoned miscreants. And for how long? Not for twenty nor forty years, but

[1] Ante hominem vita et mors.

[2] "Quod placuerit ei, dabitur illi."—*Ecclus.* xv. 18.

[3] "Ecce ego do coram vobis viam vitæ et viam mortis."—*Jer.* xxi. 8

[4] "Nemo vult sub spe salutis ægrotare."—*Ad Petr. De fid.* c. 3.

for all eternity. This is a great point; it is not a business of little moment; it is an affair of infinite importance. When Thomas More was condemned to die by Henry VIII., his wife Louisa went to him for the purpose of prevailing on him to yield to the wishes of the king. He said to her: "Tell me, Louisa, how many years could I, who am now so old, expect to live?" "You might," answered Louisa, "live for twenty years more." "O foolish woman," rejoined the holy man, "do you want me, for twenty years of life on this earth, to forfeit an eternity of happiness, and to condemn myself to an eternity of torments?" (*Sander, Schism. angl.*)

O God! give me light. If eternity were a doubtful matter, or only resting on a probable opinion, we ought to make every effort in our power to lead a good life, lest, should the doctrine of eternity be true, we should expose ourselves to the danger of being eternally miserable; but it is not doubtful, but infallibly certain; not a mere opinion, but a truth of faith. "Man shall go into the house of his eternity." "Alas!" says St. Teresa, "the want of faith is the cause of so many sins, and of the damnation of so many Christians." Let us then always enliven our faith, saying: "Credo in vitam æternam." I believe that after this life there is another which never ends. And with this thought always before our eyes, let us adopt the means of securing eternal salvation. Let us frequent the sacraments; let us make meditation every day; and let us reflect on eternal life; let us fly from dangerous occasions. And, if necessary, let us leave the world; for, to make ourselves sure of eternal life, no security can be too great.

Affections and Prayers.

There is, then, my God! no medium; I must be forever happy, or forever miserable; either in a sea of joys, or in a sea of torments; either forever with Thee in heaven, or forever

separated at a distance from Thee in hell. And this hell I know for certain I have so often deserved; but I also know for certain that Thou dost pardon all who repent, and that Thou rescuest from hell all who hope in Thee. Of this Thou assurest me. *He shall cry to me . . . I will deliver him, and will glorify him.*[1] Pardon me, then, O Lord! pardon me immediately, and deliver me from hell. O Sovereign Good! I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee. Restore to me Thy grace as soon as possible, and give me Thy holy love. Were I now in hell, I could never more love Thee; I should have to hate Thee forever. Ah, my God! what evil hast Thou done to me that I should hate Thee? Thou hast loved me unto death. Thou art worthy of infinite love. O Lord! do not permit me to be ever separated from Thee. I love Thee, and will always love Thee. *Who shall separate me from the charity of Christ?*[2] Ah, my Jesus! sin alone can separate me from Thee. Ah! through the blood which Thou didst shed for me, do not permit me to be ever separated from Thee. Strike me dead, rather than suffer me to lose Thy love. "Ne permittas me separari a te." Mary, my queen and my Mother! assist me by thy prayers; obtain for me death and a thousand deaths, rather than that I should be separated from the love of thy Son.

[1] "Clamabit ad me... eripiam eum et glorificabo eum."—*Ps.* xc. 15.
[2] "Quis ergo nos separabit a charitate Christi?"—*Rom.* viii. 35.

CONSIDERATION XV.

The Malice of Mortal Sin.

"I have brought up children and exalted them; but they have despised me."—*Isaias*, i. 2.

FIRST POINT.

The Sinner Insults God.

WHAT does the sinner do when he commits mortal sin? He insults God, he dishonors him, he afflicts him. In the first place, mortal sin is an insult offered to God. The malice of an insult is, as St. Thomas says, estimated from the condition of the person who receives, and of the person who offers, the insult. It is sinful to offend a peasant; it is more criminal to insult a nobleman; but to treat a monarch with contempt and insolence, is a still greater crime. Who is God? *He is Lord of lords, and King of kings.*[1] He is a being of infinite majesty, before whom all the princes of the earth and all the saints and angels are less than an atom of sand. *As a drop of a bucket . . . as a little dust.*[2] The Prophet Osee adds, that compared with the greatness of God, all creatures are as insignificant as if they did not exist. *All nations*, he says, *are before Him as if they had no being at all.*[3] Such is God; and what is man? He is, according to St. Bernard, a heap of worms, the food of worms, by which he shall be soon devoured. *He is miserable, and poor, and blind, and*

[1] "Dominus dominorum est, et Rex regum."—*Apoc.* xvii. 14.

[2] "Quasi stilla situlæ . . . pulvis exiguus."—*Isa.* xl. 15.

[3] "Omnes gentes, quasi non sint, sic sunt coram eo."—*Isa.* xl. 17

naked.[1] Man is a miserable worm, that can do nothing: he is so blind that he knows nothing, and so poor and naked that he possesses nothing. And this miserable worm voluntarily insults a God! "Vile dust," says the same St. Bernard, "dares to provoke such tremendous majesty."[2] The angelic Doctor, then, had just reason to say that the sin of man contains, as it were, an infinite malice. And St. Augustine calls sin "an infinite evil."[3] Hence, were all men and angels to offer themselves to death and annihilation, such an offering would not satisfy for a single sin. God punishes sin with the pains of hell; but all theologians teach that this chastisement is less than sin deserves.[4]

And what punishment can be sufficient for a worm who assails his Lord? God is the Lord of all, because he has created all. *All things are in Thy power . . . Thou hast made heaven and earth and all things.*[5] All creatures obey God. *The winds*, says St. Matthew, *and the sea obey Him. Fire, hail, snow, ice, stormy winds, which fulfil His will.*[6] But when man sins, what does he do? He says to God, Lord, I will not serve Thee. *Thou hast broken My yoke; thou hast burst My bonds; thou saidst: I will not serve.*[7] The Lord says to him: Seek not revenge; take not that property which belongs to another; abstain from that unchaste gratification. But man an-

[1] "Miser, et pauper, et cæcus, et nudus."—*Apoc.* iii. 17.

[2] "Tam tremendam majestatem audet irritare pulvisculus."—*In Cant.* s. 16.

[3] "Peccatum quamdam infinitatem habet ex infinitate divinæ majestatis."—*P.* 3. *q.* 1, *a.* 2.

[4] Citra condignum.

[5] "In ditione tua cuncta sunt posita. . . . Tu fecisti cœlum et terram."—*Esth.* xiii. 9.

[6] "Venti et mare obediunt ei."—*Matt.* viii. 27. "Ignis, grando, nix, glacies . . . faciunt verbum ejus."—*Ps.* cxlviii. 8.

[7] "Confregisti jugum meum . . . et dixisti: non serviam."—*Jer.* ii. 20.

swers: I will have revenge; I will take possession of that property; I will indulge in that forbidden pleasure. Like Pharaoh, when Moses, on the part of God, commanded him to allow the people to go into the desert, the sinner answers: *Who is the Lord, that I should hear His voice, and let Israel go?*[1] The sinner says the same—Lord, I know Thee not, I will do what I please; in a word, he insults the Lord to his face, and turns his back upon him. Mortal sin is precisely a turning away from God. Of this the Lord himself complains. *Thou hast forsaken me, saith the Lord; thou art gone backward.*[2] You have, says God, been ungrateful to me; you have turned back upon me; you *are gone backward.* God has declared that he hates sin. Hence, he cannot but hate the sinner who commits it. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*[3] In committing sin, man dares to declare himself the enemy of God, and to contend single-handed with the Lord. *He hath*, says Job, *strengthened himself against the Almighty.*[4] What would you say if you saw an insect attack an armed soldier? God is the Omnipotent Being, who, by a nod, has created heaven and earth out of nothing. And if he wishes, he can, by another act of his will, destroy all creatures. *The Almighty Lord, who, at a beck, can utterly destroy . . . the whole world.*[5] In consenting to sin, the sinner stretches out his arms against the Lord. *He hath*, says Job, *stretched out his hand against God. He hath run against Him with his neck raised up, and is armed*

[1] "Quis est Dominus, ut audiam vocem ejus? . . . Nescio Dominum."—*Exod.* v. 2.

[2] "Tu dereliquisti me, dicit Dominus; retrorsum abiisti."—*Jer* xv. 6.

[3] "Similiter autem odio sunt Deo impius et impietas ejus."—*Wis.* xiv. 9.

[4] "Contra Omnipotentem roboratus est."—*Job*, xv. 25.

[5] "Ex nihilo fecit illa Deus."—2 *Mach.* vii. 28. "Potest . . . et universum mundum uno nutu delere."—*Ibid.* viii. 18.

with a fat neck.[1] He raises his neck, that is, he swells with pride, and runs to insult God; he arms himself with a fat neck, that is, with ignorance; for a fat neck is the symbol of ignorance—of that ignorance which makes the sinner say, *What harm have I done? What great evil is that sin which I have committed? God is merciful—he pardons sinners.* What an insult! What temerity! What blindness!

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O my God! at Thy feet the rash and daring rebel who has had the temerity and the audacity to insult Thee so often to Thy very face, and to turn his back upon Thee. Thou hast said *Cry to me, and I will hear.*[2] Hell is too little for me; this I already know. But, remember, O Lord! that I am more sorry for having offended Thee, who art infinite goodness, than I would be for the loss of all my property and of my life. Ah, Lord! pardon me, and do not permit me ever to offend Thee more. Thou hast waited for me that I may forever bless Thy mercy and love Thee. Yes, I bless Thee, I love Thee, and I hope, through the merits of Jesus Christ, that I shall never again be separated from Thy love; Thy love has rescued me from hell it is by Thy love that I am to be preserved from sin for the future. I thank Thee, my Lord! for the light and the desire Thou givest me to love Thee forever. Ah! take possession of my whole being—of my soul and body—of my powers and senses—of my will and liberty. I am Thine—save me. Thou art my only good; Thou art alone amiable: may Thou also be my only love. Give me fervor in loving Thee. I have offended Thee grievously. Hence, it is not enough for me to love Thee. I wish to love Thee ardently, in order to compensate for the injuries I have done Thee. From Thee, who art omnipotent, I hope for this love. I also hope for it through thy prayers, O Mary! which are powerful before God.

[1] "Tetendit adversus Deum manum suam. . . . Cucurrit adversus eum erecto collo et pingui cervice armatus est."—*Job*, xv. 25.

[2] "Clama ad me, et exaudiam te."—*Jer.* xxxiii. 3.

SECOND POINT.

The Sinner Dishonors God.

The sinner not only insults, but he also dishonors God. *By the transgression of the law thou dishonorest God.*[1] Yes; for he renounces God's grace, and for a miserable pleasure he tramples on the friendship of God. Were man to forfeit the divine friendship in order to gain a kingdom, or even the entire world, he should do a great evil; for the friendship of God is more valuable than the world and even a thousand worlds. But for what does the sinner insult the Lord? *Wherefore hath the wicked provoked God?*[2] For a little earth, for the gratification of revenge, for a beastly pleasure, for the indulgence of vanity or caprice. *They violated Me among My people for a handful of barley and a piece of bread.*[3] When the sinner deliberates whether he will give or refuse his consent to sin, he, as it were, takes in his hand a balance and examines whether the grace of God has more or less weight than the indulgence of his passion, vanity, or pleasure; and when he consents to sin, he declares that his passion, vanity, or pleasure is of greater value than the friendship of God. Behold the Lord covered with shame by the sinner!

Contemplating the greatness and majesty of God, David said, *Lord, who is like to Thee?*[4] But seeing sinners compare and prefer a miserable gratification to his friendship, the Lord exclaimed, *To whom have you likened Me, or made Me equal?*[5] Then, he says, was that vile pleasure of greater value than my grace?—*Thou hast cast*

[1] "Per prævaricationem legis Deum inhonoras."—*Rom.* ii. 23.

[2] "Propter quid irritavit impius Deum?"—*Ps.* x. 13.

[3] "Violabant me . . . propter pugillum hordei et fragmen panis."—*Ezek.* xiii. 19.

[4] "Domine, quis similis tibi?"—*Ps.* xxxiv. 10.

[5] "Cui assimilastis me, et adæquastis? dicit Sanctus."—*Isa.* xl. 25.

Me off behind thy back.[1] Were you to forfeit a hand, or ten dollars, or even a much smaller sum, you would not have committed that sin. Then, says Salvian, is God alone so contemptible in your eyes, that he deserves to be despised for the indulgence of a passion, or for a miserable gratification?

Moreover, by offending God for the sake of his pleasure, the sinner makes that pleasure his god, by making it his last end. St. Jerome says: "What a person desires, if he worships it, is to him a god. A vice in the heart is an idol on the altar."[2] Hence St. Thomas says: "If you love delights, delights are your god."[3] And according to St. Cyprian, "Whatever man prefers to God, that he makes a god to himself."[4] When Jeroboam rebelled against the Lord, he endeavored to draw the people with him into idolatry. Hence, he placed before them his idols, saying: *Behold thy gods, O Israel.*[5] It is thus the devil acts; he represents a certain pleasure to the sinner, and says: "Make this your god: behold this pleasure, this revenge is your god: adhere to them and forsake the Lord." And in consenting to sin, the sinner obeys the devil, and in his heart adores as his god the pleasure in which he indulges.[6]

If the sinner dishonors God he surely does not dishonor him in his presence! Oh! he insults and dishonors God to his very face; for God is present in all places. *Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?*[7] This, sin-

[1] "Projecisti me post corpus tuum."—*Ezek.* xxiii. 35.

[2] "Unusquisque quod cupit et veneratur, hoc illi deus est."—*In Ps.* lxxx.

[3] Si amas delicias, deliciæ dicuntur deus tuus.

[4] "Quidquid homo Deo anteponit, sibi deum facit."—*De Dup. Mart.*

[5] "Ecce dii tui, Israel."—3 *Kings*, xii. 28.

[6] Vitium in corde, est idolum in altari.

[7] "Cœlum et terram ego impleo."—*Jer.* xxiii. 24.

ners know, and still they dare to provoke God before his eyes. *They provoke Me to anger before My face.*'[1]

Affections and Prayers.

Thou, then, my God! art an infinite good, and I have frequently exchanged Thee for a miserable pleasure, which I had scarcely indulged when it vanished. But Thou, though despised by me, now offerest me pardon if I wish for it, and Thou promisest to give me Thy grace, if I repent of having offended Thee. Yes, my Lord! I repent with my whole heart of having outraged Thee so grievously: I detest my sins above all things. Behold! I already return to Thee, as I hope, and Thou already receivest me, and embracest me as Thy child. I thank Thee, O infinite Goodness! but assist me now, and do not permit me ever again to banish Thee from my heart. Hell will not cease to tempt me; but Thou art more powerful than hell. I know that I shall never more abandon Thee, if I always recommend myself to Thee. The grace, then, which I ask is, that I may always recommend myself to Thee, and that I may always say to Thee, as I now do, Lord, assist me; give me light, give me strength, give me perseverance, give me paradise; but above all, give me Thy love, which is the true paradise of souls. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! and I wish always to love Thee. Hear me for the love of Jesus Christ. Mary, thou art the refuge of sinners: assist, by thy prayers, a sinner who wishes to love thy God.

THIRD POINT.

The Sinner Afflicts God.

The sinner insults God, he dishonors God, and fills the heart of God with grief and bitterness. There is nothing more galling than to be treated with ingratitude by a person tenderly loved and highly favored. Whom does the sinner assail? He insults a God who has created him, and has loved him so as to give his blood

[1] "Ad iracundiam provocat me ante faciem meam semper."—*Isa.* lxv. 3.

and his life for his salvation; and by committing mortal sin he banishes God from his heart. God comes to dwell in the soul that loves him. *If any one love Me . . . My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.*"[1] Mark the words — *We will make Our abode with him.* God comes to dwell forever in the soul; he never departs from it, unless he is driven away. According to the Council of Trent, "He deserts not the soul, unless he is deserted."[2] But, O Lord! Thou knowest that the ungrateful sinner will, in a few moments, banish Thee: why dost Thou not instantly depart from him? Wilt Thou wait until he expels Thee? Abandon him; depart from him before he offers Thee this great insult. "No," says the Lord, "I will not depart until he himself chases Me away."

Then, in consenting to sin, the soul says to God: Lord, depart from me. *The wicked*, says Job, *have said to God, Depart from us.*[3] The sinner, according to St. Gregory, says the same, not in words, but by acts. The sinner knows that God cannot dwell with sin; in yielding to sin, he sees that God must depart; hence, by his conduct he says to God: Since Thou canst not remain in me along with my sin, depart—farewell. And through the very door by which God leaves the soul, the devil enters. *Then he goeth and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there.*[4] In baptizing an infant, the priest commands the devil to depart. "Go out from him, unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Ghost."[5] Yes; for the soul, by receiving the grace of God, becomes his

[1] "Si quis diligit me . . . Pater meus diliget eum, et ad eum veniemus, et mansionem apud eum faciemus."—*John*, xiv. 23.

[2] "Non deserit, nisi deseratur."—*Sess.* 6, *cap.* 11.

[3] "Dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis."—*Job*, xxi. 14.

[4] "Tunc vadit, et assumit septem alios spiritus secum nequiores se, et intrantes habitant ibi."—*Matt.* xii. 45.

[5] Exi ab eo, immunde spiritus, et da locum Spiritui Sancto.

temple. *Know you not*, says St. Paul, *that you are the temple of God?*[1] But, in consenting to sin, man does the very contrary: he says to God, who is in his soul: "Go out from me, O Lord, make room for the devil."[2] Of this the Lord complained to St. Bridget, saying, that he is treated by the sinner as a king expelled from his throne. "I am like a monarch banished from his own dominions: and in my place the worst of plunderers is chosen."[3]

What pain should you feel if you received a grievous insult from a person on whom you had lavished favors? This is the pain which you have given to your God who laid down his life for your salvation. The Lord calls heaven and earth to pity him on account of the ingratitude of sinners. *Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth. . . . I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised Me.*[4] In a word, by their iniquities sinners afflict the heart of God. *But they provoked to wrath and afflicted the Spirit of the Holy One.*[5] God is not susceptible of pain; but were he capable of sorrow, a single mortal sin should, as Father Medina teaches, be sufficient to make him die through pure grief. "Mortal sin would, were it possible, destroy God himself, because it would be the cause of infinite sadness in God."[6] Thus, as St. Bernard says, "Sin, as far as in it lies, destroys God"[7]

[1] "Nescitis quia templum Dei estis?"—1 *Cor.* iii. 16.

[2] Exi a me, Domine, da locum diabolo.

[3] "Sum tamquam rex a proprio regno expulsus, in cujus loco latro pessimus electus est."—*Rev.* l. 1. c. 1.

[4] "Audite, cœli; auribus percipe, terra: Filios enutrivi, et exaltavi: ipsi autem spreverunt me."—*Isa.* i. 2.

[5] "Ipsi autem ad iracundiam provocaverunt, et afflixerunt spiritum Sancti ejus."—*Isa.* lxiii. 10.

[6] "Peccatum mortale, si possibile esset, destrueret ipsum Deum, eo quod causa esset tristitiæ in Deo infinitæ."—*De Satisf. q.* 1.

[7] "Peccatum, quantum in se est Deum perimit."—*In temp. Pasch.* s. 3.

In committing mortal sin, the sinner, as it were, gives poison to God, and does all in his power to deprive him of life. *The sinner*, says David, *hath provoked the Lord.*[1] And according to St. Paul, he tramples on the Son of God. For he despises all that Jesus Christ has done and suffered in order to take away the sins of the world.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my Redeemer, as often as I have sinned, I have banished Thee from my soul, and have done what would, were it possible for Thee to die, have taken away Thy life. I now hear Thee ask: *What evil have I done Thee? Tell Me. What displeasure have I given Thee that thou shouldst offer Me so many insults?* Lord, Thou hast given me existence, and hast died for me. Behold the evil Thou hast done me. What answer then can I make? I say that I have deserved a thousand hells; Thou hast just ground for sending me to everlasting torments. But remember the love which made Thee die on the cross for my salvation: remember the blood which Thou hast shed for my sake, and have mercy on me. But I know that Thou dost not wish that I despair; on the contrary Thou makest me feel that Thou standest at the door of my heart, and that by Thine inspirations Thou knockest for admission. *I stand at the gate, and knock.* Thou tellest me to open—*Open to Me, my sister.* Yes, my Jesus: I banish sin from my soul; I am sorry for it with my whole heart, and I love Thee above all things. Enter, O my love! the gate is open; enter, and never more depart from me. Bind me to Thyself by Thy love, and do not permit me to be ever separated from Thee. No, my God! we will never again be disunited; I embrace Thee and unite Thee to my heart; give me holy perseverance. "Ne permittas me separari a Te." Mary, my Mother, assist me always; pray to Jesus for me; obtain for me this favor, that I may never more lose his grace.

[1] "Exacerbavit Dominum peccator."—*Ps.* x. 4. "Qui Filium Dei conculcaverit."—*Heb.* x. 29.

CONSIDERATION XVI.

The Mercy of God.

"Mercy exalteth itself above judgment."—*St. James*, ii. 13.

FIRST POINT.

God Waits for the Sinner.

Good is naturally diffusive—that is, inclined to communicate its good even to others. But God, who is by nature infinite goodness, as St. Leo expresses himself,[1] has an infinite desire to impart his own felicity to us; and therefore his inclination is, not to chastise, but to show mercy to all. To punish is, according to Isaias, a work opposed to the inclination of God. *He shall be angry . . . that he may do His work, His strange work: His work is strange to Him.*[2] And when the Lord chastises in this life, he does it in order to show mercy in the next. *O God! . . . Thou hast been angry, and hast had mercy on us.*[3] He appears angry that we may enter into ourselves and detest our sins. *Thou hast shown Thy people hard things; Thou hast made us drink the wine of sorrow.*[4] And when he sends us any chastisement, he does it because he loves us, and wishes to deliver us from eter-

[1] Deus cujus natura bonitas.

[2] "Irascetur, ut faciat opus suum, alienum opus ejus . . . peregrinum est opus ejus ab eo."—*Isa.* xxviii. 21.

[3] "Deus, iratus es, et misertus es nobis."—*Ps.* lix. 3.

[4] "Ostendisti populo tuo dura; potasti nos vino compunctionis."—*Ps.* lix. 5.

nal punishment. *Thou hast given a warning to them that fear Thee, that they may flee from before the bow, that Thy beloved may be delivered.*[1] And who can sufficiently admire and praise the mercy of God toward sinners in waiting for them, in calling them, and in receiving them when they return? Oh! how great is the mercy of God in waiting for our repentance! My brother, when you offended God, he could have struck you dead; but he waited for you, and instead of chastising you, he conferred favors upon you, he preserved your life, and provided for you. He pretended not to see your sins, that you might repent. *Thou overlookest the sins of men for the sake of penance.*[2] But, O Lord, how does it happen that Thou canst not bear to behold a single sin, and beholdest so many of them in silence? *Thou canst not look on iniquity; why lookest Thou upon them that do unjust things, and holdest Thy peace?*[3] Thou beholdest the blasphemer, the unchaste, the vindictive man, multiplying iniquities from day to day; and Thou dost not chastise him: and why so much patience. *Therefore the Lord waiteth that He may have mercy on thee.*[4] God waits for sinners, that they may amend, and that thus he may pardon and save them.

St. Thomas says, that all creatures, fire, the earth, air, water, by a natural instinct, would wish to punish and to take vengeance on the injuries done to their Creator.[5] But God in his mercy restrains them. But, O Lord!

[1] Dedisti metuentibus te significationem, ut fugiant a facie arcus, ut liberentur dilecti tui."—*Ps.* lix. 6.

[2] "Dissimulas peccata hominum propter pœnitentiam."—*Wis.* xi. 24.

[3] "Respicere ad iniquitatem non poteris; quare respicis super iniqua agentes, et taces?"—*Habac.* i. 13.

[4] "Propterea expectat Dominus, ut misereatur vestri."—*Isa.* xxx. 18.

[5] "Creatura enim tibi Factori deserviens, exardescit in tormentum adversus injustos."—*Wisd.* xvi. 24.

Thou waitest for these impious wretches, that they may see their wickedness: but dost not Thou see that they ungratefully take advantage of Thy mercy to offend Thee still more? *Thou hast been favorable to the nation: Thou hast been favorable to the nation: art Thou glorified?*[1] And why so much patience? *Because God wills not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live.*[2] O patience of God! St. Augustine goes so far as to say that God, were he not God, would be unjust on account of his excessive patience toward sinners.[3] To wait for those who abuse patience to become more insolent, appears to be an injustice to the divine honor. "We sin," continues the holy Doctor, "we adhere to sin."[4] Some make peace with sin, and sleep in sin for months and years. "Gaudemus de peccato"—*We rejoice at sin;* others go so far as to boast of their wickedness; and Thou art appeased.[5] We provoke Thee to anger—Thou invitest us to mercy.[6] We appear to be engaged with God in a contest in which we labor to provoke him to chastise our guilt; and he invites us to pardon.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord! I know that I deserve to be at this moment in hell. Hell is my house.[7] But, through Thy mercy, I am not now in that place of woe, but I am here at Thy feet, and feel that Thou wishest and commandest me to love Thee. *Thou*

[1] "Indulsisti genti, Domine, indulsisti genti; numquid glorificatus es?"—*Isa.* xxvi. 15.

[2] "Nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur et vivat."—*Ezek.* xxxiii. 11.

[3] "Deus meus, pace tua dicam: nisi quia Deus es, injustus esses"—*De Vis. inf.* l. 1. c. 5.

[4] Nos peccavimus, inhæremus peccato.

[5] Et tu placatus es?

[6] Nos te provocamus ad iram, tu autem conducis nos ad misericordiam.

[7] Infernus domus mea est.—*Job,* xvii. 13.

shalt love the Lord thy God.[1] I hear Thee tell me that Thou wilt pardon me if I repent of the injuries I have done Thee. Yes, my God: since Thou wishest me, a miserable rebel against Thy majesty, to love Thee, I love Thee with my whole heart, and I feel more regret for the outrages I have offered to Thee, than for any evil that could have befallen me. Ah! enlighten me, O infinite Goodness; make me sensible of the wrongs I have done Thee. I will no longer resist Thy calls. I will give no more displeasure to a God who has loved me so tenderly, who has pardoned me so often and with so much love. Ah! that I had never offended Thee, my Jesus; pardon me, and grant that, from this day forward, I may love nothing but Thee: that I may live only for Thee, who didst die for me; that I may suffer for Thy love, since Thou hast suffered so much for the love of me. Thou hast loved me from eternity; Grant that for eternity I may burn with Thy love. I hope for all things, O my Saviour, through Thy merits; I trust also in thee, O Mary; save me by thy intercession.

SECOND POINT.

God Calls the Sinner.

Consider, moreover, the mercy of God in calling the sinner to repentance. When Adam rebelled against the Lord, and hid himself from his face, behold, God, having lost Adam, goes in search of him, and calls him as it were with tears. *Adam, where art thou?*[2] "These," says Father Pereira in his commentary on this passage, "are the words of a father seeking a lost son."[3] My brother, God has often done the same to you. You fled from God, and he sought after you, calling you at one time by his inspiration, at another by remorse of conscience, now by sermons, again by tribulations, and by the death of your friends. Speaking of you, Jesus appears to say

[1] "Diliges Dominum Deum tuum."—*Deut.* vi. 5.

[2] "Adam, ubi es?"—*Gen.* iii. 9.

[3] Sunt verba patris quærentis filium suum perditum.

I have labored with crying: my jaws are become hoarse.[1] My son, I have almost lost my voice in calling you to repentance. Remember, O sinners, says St. Teresa, that that Lord who will one day be your judge, is now calling you to return to him.

Dearly beloved Christian, how often have you been deaf to the calls of God? You deserved that he should call you no more; but your God has not ceased to call you, because he wishes to make peace with you, and to save you. Who was it that called you? A God of infinite majesty. And what were you but a miserable fetid worm! Why did he call you? For no other purpose than to restore to you the life of grace which you had lost? *Return ye and live.*[2] To acquire the divine grace, it would be but little to live in a desert during your entire life. God offered to give you his grace at each moment, if you wished to obtain it by making an act of contrition, and you refused. And after all this, God has not abandoned you, he has gone in search of you, as it were weeping, and saying: Son, why will you bring yourself to perdition? *And why will you die, O house of Israel?*[3]

When man commits a mortal sin, he banishes God from his soul. The wicked have said to God, *Depart from us.*[4] But what does God do? He places himself at the door of that ungrateful heart. *Behold, I stand at the gate and knock.*[5] He even appears to entreat the soul to allow him to enter. *Open to Me, my sister.*[6] He grows weary praying for admission. *I am weary of entreating thee.*[7] Yes, says St. Denis, the Areopagite, God follows sinners like a despised lover, entreating them not to

[1] "Laboravi clamans, raucæ factæ sunt fauces meæ."—*Ps.* lxviii. 4.
[2] "Revertimini, et vivite."—*Ezek* xviii. 32.
[3] "Et quare moriemini, domus Israel?"—*Ezek* xviii. 31.
[4] "Dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis."—*Job*, xxi. 14.
[5] "Ecce sto ad ostium, et pulso."—*Apoc.* iii. 20.
[6] "Aperi mihi, soror mea."—*Cant.* v. 2.
[7] "Laboravi rogans."—*Jer.* xv. 6.

destroy their souls.[1] And this precisely the Apostle meant when he wrote to his disciples. *For Christ, I beseech you to be reconciled to God.*[2] In explaining this passage, St. John Chrysostom makes a beautiful reflection "Christ himself entreats you; but what does he entreat you to do? To be reconciled to God; for it is not God that acts like an enemy, but you."[3] The saint's meaning is, that the sinner has not to labor in order to move God to make peace with him; for he, and not God, refuses peace.

Ah! this good Lord goes every day in search of so many sinners, continually saying to them: Ungrateful souls, do not fly away any longer; tell me why you fly away from me? I love your welfare, and desire nothing else than to make you happy. Why will you destroy yourselves? But, O Lord, what is it Thou dost? Why so much patience and so much love toward these rebels? What good dost Thou expect from them? It redounds but little to Thy honor to show such an excess of love for the miserable worms that fly away from Thee. *What is a man, that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him.*[4]

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O Lord! at Thy feet an ungrateful soul, imploring mercy. Father, forgive me. I call Thee Father, because Thou wishest me thus to call Thee. My Father, pardon me. I do not deserve pity, for I have treated Thee with ingratitude because Thou hast been bountiful to me. Ah, my God! through that goodness which did not allow Thee to abandon me when

[1] "Deus etiam a se aversos amatorie sequitur, et deprecatur ne pereant."—*Ad Demoph.*

[2] "Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo."—2 *Cor.* v. 20.

[3] Ipse Christus vos obsecrat. Quid autem obsecrat? Reconciliamini Deo. Non enim ipse inimicitias gerit, sed vos.

[4] "Quid est homo, quia magnificas eum? aut quid apponis erga eum cor tuum?"—*Job*, vii. 17.

fled from Thee, receive me, now that I return to Thee. Give me, O my Jesus! a great sorrow for the offences I have offered to Thee, and give me the kiss of peace. I am sorry above all things for the injuries I have done Thee; I detest and abhor them, and I unite this hatred and abhorrence to that which Thou, O my Redeemer! didst feel for them in the garden of Gethsemane. Ah! pardon me through the merits of that blood which Thou hast shed for me in the garden. I promise firmly never more to depart from Thee, and to banish from my heart every affection which is not for Thee. My Jesus, my love! I love Thee above all things: I wish always to love Thee, and love Thee alone: give me strength to execute this good will, make me all Thine. O Mary, my hope after Jesus! thou art the Mother of mercy: pray to God for me, and have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

God Receives the Sinner with Kindness.

The princes of the earth disdain even to look at the rebel who comes to ask pardon; but God acts not in this manner with us: *He will not turn away His face from you, if you return to Him.*[1] God cannot turn away his face from those who return and cast themselves at his feet: no; for he himself invites them, and promises to receive them as soon as they come. *Return to Me, saith the Lord, and I will receive thee.*[2] *Turn to Me . . . and I will turn to you, saith the Lord of Hosts.*[3] Oh! with what love and tenderness does God embrace the sinner that returns to him. This love and tenderness Jesus Christ wished to give us to understand by the parable of the sheep, which the shepherd, when he found it, placed on his shoulders.

[1] "Non avertet faciem suam a vobis, si reversi fueritis ad eum."—2 *Par.* xxx. 9.

[2] "Revertere ad me, dicit Dominus, et ego suscipiam te."—*Jer.* iii. 1.

[3] "Convertimini ad me, . . . et convertar ad vos, dicit Dominus."—*Zac.* i. 3.

Doth he not lay it upon his shoulders, rejoicing; and coming home, call together his friends and neighbors, saying to them: Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.[1] The Redeemer adds: *There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance.*[2] This tenderness the Saviour declared more fully in the parable of the prodigal son; in which he tells us that he is the father who, when he saw his lost son returning, runs to meet him, and before his son utters a word, embraces and kisses him, and in embracing him, almost swoons away through tenderness of consolation. *And running to him he fell upon his neck and kissed him.*[3]

The Lord promises that, if sinners repent, he will even forget their sins, as if they had never offended him. *If the wicked do penance . . . living he shall live. . . . I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done.*[4] He even goes so far as to say, *Come and accuse Me, saith the Lord; if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow.*[5] As if he said: Sinners, *come and accuse Me;* if I do not pardon you, reprove me, upbraid me with having been unfaithful to my promises. But no; God knows not how to despise an humble and contrite heart.

The Lord glories in showing mercy and granting pardon to sinners. *And therefore shall He be exalted sparing you.*[6] And how long does he defer pardon? Not an instant: he grants it immediately. *Weeping*, says the Prophet

[1] "Imponit in humeros suos gaudens. Congratulamini mihi, quia inveni ovem meam quæ perierat."—*Luke*, xv. 5.

[2] Gaudium erit in cœlo super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente.

[3] "Accurrens cecidit super collum ejus et osculatus est eum."—*Luke*, xv. 20.

[4] "Si impius egerit pœnitentiam . . . vita vivet . . . omnium iniquitatum ejus . . . non recordabor."—*Ezek.* xviii. 21.

[5] "Venite et arguite me, dicit Dominus: si fuerint peccata vestra ut coccinum, quasi nix dealbabuntur."—*Isa.* i. 18.

[6] "Exaltabitur parcens vobis."—*Isa.* xxx. 18.

Isaias, *thou shalt not weep; He will surely have pity on thee.*[1] Sinners, exclaims the prophet, you have not long to weep; at the first tear the Lord will be moved to pity: *At the voice of thy cry, as soon as He shall hear, He will answer thee.*[2] God does not treat us as we treat him: we are deaf to the calls of God: but *as soon as he shall hear, he will answer thee;* the very instant you repent and ask forgiveness, God answers and grants your pardon.

Affections and Prayers.

O my God! against whom have I rebelled? Against Thee, who art so good, against Thee that hast created me, and died for me. After so many acts of treason, Thee hast borne with me. Ah! the thought of the patience Thou hast had with me ought to make me live always on fire with Thy love. And who would have borne so long as Thou hast the injuries which I have done Thee? Miserable shall I be, should I ever again offend Thee, and condemn myself to hell! I already see that Thy mercy can bear with me no longer. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having offended Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart: I am resolved to give Thee all the remainder of my life. Hear me, O Eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ: give me holy perseverance and Thy love: hear me, O my Jesus! for the sake of the blood which Thou hast shed for me. We therefore beseech Thee, assist Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood.[3] O Mary, my Mother! look upon me, "turn thy eyes of mercy to us," and draw me entirely to God.

[1] "Plorans nequaquam plorabis; miserans miserebitur tui."—*Isa.* xxx. 19.

[2] "Ad vocem clamoris tui, statim ut audierit, respondebit tibi."—*Ibid.*

[3] Te ergo quæsumus, tuis famulis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.

CONSIDERATION XVII.

Abuse of Divine Mercy.

"Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?"—*Rom.* ii. 4.

FIRST POINT.

God is Merciful, but He is also Just.

We read in the parable of the cockle, that the servants of the good man of the house, seeing that it had grown up in the field along with the wheat, wished to pluck it up. *Wilt thou*, said they, *that we go and gather it up?*[1] No, replied the master; suffer it to grow up, and then it shall be gathered and cast into the fire. *In the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather up first the cockle, and bind it in bundles to burn.*[2] In this parable we see, on the one hand, the patience with which the Lord treats sinners; and on the other, the rigor with which he chastises the obstinate. St. Augustine says that the devil deludes men in two ways, *by despair and hope.*[3] After the sinner has offended God, the enemy, by placing before his eyes the terror of divine justice, tempts him to despair; but before he sins, the devil encourages him to sin with the hope of divine mercy. Hence the saint gives to all the following advice: "After

[1] "Vis, imus et colligimus ea?"—*Matt* xiii. 24.

[2] "In tempore messis dicam messoribus: colligite primum zizania, et alligate ea in fasciculos ad comburendum."—*Ibid.* 30.

[3] "Desperando et sperando."—*In Jo.* tr. 33.

sin, hope for mercy; before sin, fear justice."[1] He who abuses God's mercy to offend him, is undeserving of mercy. God shows mercy to those who fear him, but not to those who avail themselves of his mercy to banish the fear of God from their hearts. Abulensis says that he who offends justice may have recourse to mercy; but to whom can he have recourse, who offends mercy itself?

It is hard to find a sinner so sunk in despair as to wish for his own damnation. Sinners wish to sin, without losing the hope of salvation. They sin and say: God is merciful, I will commit this sin, and will afterward confess it. They say, observes St. Augustine, "God is good, I will do what I please."[2] Behold, the language of sinners: but, O God, such too was the language of so many who are now in hell.

Say not, says the Lord, that the mercies of God are great; that however enormous your sins may be, you will obtain pardon by an act of contrition. *And say not: The mercy of the Lord is great: He will have mercy on the multitude of my sins.*[3] Say it not, says the Lord; and why? *For mercy and wrath quickly come from Him, and His wrath looketh upon sinners.*[4] The mercy of God is infinite; but the acts of his mercy, or his mercies are finite. God is merciful, but he is also just. "I am just and merciful," said our Lord to St. Bridget; "but sinners regard me only as merciful."[5] St. Basil writes that sinners wish to consider God only as good and merciful. To bear

[1] Post peccatum, spera misericordiam; ante peccatum, pertimesce justitiam.

[2] "Bonus est Deus, faciam quod mihi placet."—*In Jo. tr.* 33.

[3] "Ne dicas: Miseratio Domini magna est, multitudinis peccatorum meorum miserebitur."—*Eccles.* v. 6.

[4] "Misericordia enim et ira ab illo cito proximant, et in peccatores respicit ira illius."—*Ibid.*

[5] "Ego sum justus et misericors; peccatores tantum misericordem me existimant."—*Rev.* l. 1, c. 5.

with those who avail themselves of the mercy of God to offend him, would not, says Father M. Avila, be mercy, but a want of justice. Mercy is promised, not to those who abuse it, but those who fear God. *And His mercy*, said the divine mother, *to those that fear Him.*[1] Against the obstinate, threats of just retribution have been pronounced; and, says St. Augustine, as God is not unfaithful to his promises, so he is not a liar in his threats.[2]

Beware, says St. John Chrysostom, when the devil, not God, promises you divine mercy, that he may induce you to commit sin. "Never attend to that dog that promises to you the mercy of God."[3] "Woe," says St. Augustine, "to him who hopes in order to sin."[4] Oh! how many, says the saint, has this vain hope deluded and brought to perdition! "They who have been deceived by this shadow of vain hope cannot be numbered."[5] Miserable the man who abuses the mercy of God to offer new insults to his majesty! St. Bernard says that Lucifer's chastisement was accelerated, because he rebelled against God with the hope of escaping punishment. King Manasses sinned; he afterward repented, and obtained pardon. His son Ammon, seeing that his father's sins were so easily forgiven, abandoned himself to a wicked life with the hope of pardon: but for Ammon there was no mercy. Hence, St. John Chrysostom asserts that Judas was lost because he sinned through confidence in the benignity of Jesus Christ.[6] In fine, God bears, but he does not bear forever. Were

[1] "Misericordia ejus . . . timentibus eum."—*Luke*, i. 50

[2] "Qui verus est in promittendo, verus est in minando."—*De vera Pœnit.* c. 7.

[3] "Cave ne unquam canem illum suscipias, qui misericordiam Dei pollicetur."—*Scal. spir. gr.* 6.

[4] "Sperat ut peccet, væ a perversa spe."—*In Ps.* 144.

[5] "Dinumerari non possunt, quantos hæc inanis spei umbra decepe-rit."—*Serm.* 154, *E, B app.*

[6] "Fidit in lenitate magistri."—*In Mat. hom.* 83.

God to bear forever with sinners, no one would be damned: but the most common opinion is that the greater part of adults, even among Christians, are lost. *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat.*[1]

According to St. Augustine, he who offends God with the hope of pardon "is a scoffer, not a penitent."[2] But St. Paul tells us that God does not allow himself to be mocked.[3] To continue to offend God as often and as long as the sinner pleases, and afterward to gain heaven, would be to mock God. *For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.*[4] He that sows sin, has no reason to hope for anything else than chastisement and hell. The net with which the devil drags to hell almost all Christians who are damned, is the delusion by which he leads them into sin with the hope of pardon. Sin freely, he says to them; for, after all your iniquities, you will be saved. But God curses the man that sins with the hope of mercy. The hope of sinners after sin is pleasing to God, when it is accompanied with repentance; but the hope of the obstinate is an abomination to the Lord.[5] As the conduct of a servant who insults his master because he is good and merciful, irritates the master, so such hope provokes God to inflict vengeance.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! I have been one of those who have offended Thee because Thou wert bountiful to me. Ah, Lord! wait for me, do not abandon me. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee, and for having so much abused Thy patience. I thank Thee for having waited for me till now.

[1] "Lata porta, et spatiosa via est, quæ ducit ad perditionem, et multi sunt qui intrant per eam."—*Matt.* vii. 13.

[2] "Irrisor est, non pœnitens."—*Ad Frat. in er. s.* 11.

[3] "Deus non irridetur."—*Gal.* vi. 7.

[4] "Quæ seminaverit homo, hæc et metet."—*Ibid.* 8.

[5] "Et spes illorum, abominatio.—*Job*, xi. 20.

Henceforth I will never more betray Thee, as I have hitherto done. Thou hast borne with me so long, that Thou mightest one day see me a lover of Thy goodness. Behold, this day has, I hope, arrived: I love Thee above all things, and esteem Thy grace more than all the kingdoms of the world: rather than lose it, I am ready to forfeit life a thousand times. My God! for the love of Jesus Christ, give me holy perseverance till death, along with Thy holy love. Do not permit me ever again to betray Thee, or to cease to love Thee. Mary! thou art my hope: obtain for me this gift of perseverance, and I ask nothing more.

SECOND POINT.

The Sinner Abandoned by God.

Some will say: God has hitherto shown me so many mercies, I hope he will treat me with the same mercy for the future. But I answer: And will you insult God again, because he has been so merciful to you? Then, says St. Paul, do you thus despise the mercy and patience of God? Do you not know that the Lord has borne with you to this moment, not that you may continue to offend him, but that you may weep over the evil you have done? *Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and patience and long-suffering? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?*[1] If through confidence in the divine mercy you continue to sin, the Lord will cease to show mercy. *Except you be converted*, says David, *he will brandish his sword.*[2] *Revenge is mine, and I will repay thee in due time.*[3] God waits; but when the time of chastisement arrives, he waits no longer, but executes vengeance.

Therefore the Lord waiteth, that he may have mercy on you.[4]

[1] "An divitias bonitatis ejus et patientiæ contemnis? Ignoras quoniam benignitas Dei ad pœnitentiam te adducit?"—*Rom.* ii. 4.

[2] "Nisi conversi fueritis, gladium suum vibrabit."—*Ps.* vii. 13.

[3] "Mea est ultio, et ego retribuam in tempore."—*Deut.* xxxii. 35.

[4] "Propterea expectat Dominus, ut misereatur vestri."—*Isa.* xxx. 18.

God waits for sinners, that they may amend: but when he sees that the time given to bewail their sins is employed in multiplying crimes, he then calls the very time to judge them. *He hath called against me the time.*[1] "The very time," says Gregory, "comes to judge."[2] Thus the very time given, and the very mercies shown to sinners, will serve to make God chastise them with greater rigor, and abandon them sooner. *We would have cured Babylon, but she is not healed: let us forsake her.*[3] And how does God abandon sinners? He either sends them a sudden death, and makes them die in sin, or he deprives them of his abundant graces, and leaves them with the sufficient grace, with which they can, but will not, save their souls. The blindness of their understanding, the hardness of their heart, the evil habits which they have contracted, will render their salvation morally impossible; and thus they will be, if not absolutely, at least morally abandoned. *I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted.*[4] Oh! what a chastisement! When the master of the vineyard takes away its hedges, and leaves it open to men and to beasts, does he not show that he abandons it? It is thus that God acts when he abandons the soul: he takes away the hedge of holy fear, and of remorse of conscience, and leaves it in darkness. And then all the monsters of crime will enter the soul. *Thou hast appointed darkness, and it is night: in it shall all the beasts of the wood go about.*[5] And the sinner, abandoned in that obscurity, will despise the grace of God, heaven, admonitions, and excommunications; and will make a jest of his

[1] "Vocavit adversum me tempus."—*Lam.* i. 15.

[2] Ipsum tempus ad judicandum venit.

[3] "Curavimus Babylonem, et non est sanata; derelinquamus eam."—*Jer.* li. 9.

[4] "Auferam sepem ejus, et erit in direptionem."—*Isa.* v. 5.

[5] "Posuisti tenebras, et facta est nox; in ipsa pertransibunt omnes bestiæ silvæ."—*Ps.* ciii. 20.

own damnation. *The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth.*[1]

God will not chastise the sinner in this life; but, not to be punished in this world will be the greatest chastisement of the wicked. *Let us have pity on the wicked, but he will not learn justice.*[2] On this passage St. Bernard says, "This mercy I do not wish for: it is above all wrath."[3] Oh! what a chastisement is it when God abandons the sinner into the hands of his sins, and appears not to demand any further account of them! *According to the multitude of his wrath he will not seek him.*[4] God appears not to be enraged against sinners. *My jealousy shall depart from you, and I will cease and be angry no more.*[5]—He appears to allow them all that they desire in this life. *I let them go according to the desires of their heart.*[6] Miserable the sinner that prospers in this life! His prosperity is a sign that God waits to make him a victim of his justice for eternity. *Why*, said Jeremias, *doth the way of the wicked prosper?* He answers: *Gather them together as sheep for a sacrifice.*[7] There is no punishment greater than that which God inflicts, when he permits a sinner to add sin to sin. *Add thou iniquity upon their iniquity . . . let them be blotted out of the book of the living.*[8] In explaining these words, Bellarmine says that

[1] "Impius, cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit."—*Prov.* xviii. 3.

[2] "Misereamur impio, et non discet justitiam."—*Isa.* xxvi. 10.

[3] "Misericordiam hanc ego nolo; super omnem iram miseratio ista."—*In Cant.* s. 42.

[4] "Secundum multitudinem iræ suæ non quæret."—*Ps.* ix. 4.

[5] "Auferetur zelus meus a te, et quiescam, nec irascar amplius."—*Ezek.* xvi. 42.

[6] "Et dimisi eos secundum desideria cordis eorum."—*Ps.* lxxx. 13.

[7] "Quare via impiorum prosperatur? . . . congrega eos quasi gregem ad victimam."—*Jer.* xii. 1.

[8] "Appone iniquitatem super iniquitatem . . . . Deleantur de libro viventium."—*Ps.* lxviii. 28.

"there is no punishment greater than when sin is the punishment of sin."[1] It would be a smaller punishment to be struck dead by the Lord after their first sin; for, by dying afterward they will suffer as many hells as they have committed sins.

Affections and Prayers.

My God! I know that in my miserable state I have deserved to be deprived of Thy grace and light: but seeing the light which Thou now givest me, and feeling that Thou now callest me to repentance, I have just reason to hope that Thou hast not as yet abandoned me. And since, O Lord! Thou hast not abandoned me, multiply Thy mercies on my soul, increase Thy light, increase my desire to serve and love Thee. Change me, O omnipotent God! and from being a traitor and rebel, make me a great lover of Thy goodness, that I may one day enter heaven to praise Thy mercies for all eternity. Thou dost then wish to pardon me, and I desire nothing but the pardon of my sins and the gift of Thy love. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having so often offended Thee. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good! because Thou commandest me to love Thee; I love Thee, because Thou well deservest my love. Ah, my Redeemer, through the merits of Thy blood, give Thy love to a sinner whom Thou hast loved so ardently, and whom Thou hast borne with so patiently for so many years: I hope for every grace from Thy mercy. I hope to love Thee always till death, and for eternity. *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.*[2] I will praise Thy mercy, O my Jesus. I will forever praise thy mercy, O Mary! who hast obtained for me so many graces; I acknowledge that I have received them all through thy intercession. Continue, O my Mother! to assist me by thy prayers, and to obtain for me holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

Unfortunate is he who allows the Time of Mercy to pass by.

It is related in the life of Father Louis La Nusa, that in Palermo there were two friends, who went one day to

[1] Nulla pœna major, quam cum peccatum est pœna peccati.

[2] "Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo."—*Ps.* lxxxviii. 2.

take a walk. One of them, called Cæsar, who was a comedian, seeing the other oppressed with melancholy, said: How long is it since you were at confession? Is it on account of your long absence from the sacraments that you are so much troubled? Listen to me: "Father La Nusa told me one day that God gave me twelve years to live, and that if, within that period, I did not amend, I should die an unhappy death. I have since travelled through so many parts of the world; I have had many attacks of sickness, one of which brought me to the brink of death; but, in this month the twelve years will be completed, and I now feel better than in any part of my past life." He then invited his friend to hear, on Saturday, a new comedy, which he had composed. But what happened? On Saturday, the 24th of November, 1688, as he was going on the stage, he was seized with apoplexy, and died suddenly. He expired in the arms of a female comedian, and thus the comedy ended. But let us make the application to ourselves. Brother, when the devil tempts you again to sin, if you wish to be lost, you have it in your power to commit sin: but do not then say that you wish to be saved. As long as you wish to sin, regard yourself as damned, and imagine that God writes the sentence of your damnation, and that he says to you: *What is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard, that I have not done to it?*[1] Ungrateful soul, what more ought I to do for you, that I have not done? But, since you wish to be lost, go into eternal fire; the fault is your own.

But you will say, Where then is the mercy of God? Ah, unhappy soul? do you not feel that God has shown you mercy in bearing with you for so many years, after so many sins? You should remain forever prostrate on the earth, thanking him for his mercy, and saying: *The*

[1] "Quid est quod debui ultra facere vineæ meæ, et non feci ei?"—*Isa.* v. 4.

mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed.[1] By committing a single mortal sin, you have been guilty of a greater crime than if you had trampled under foot the first monarch in the world. You have been guilty of so many mortal sins, that if you had committed against your brother the injuries which you have offered to God, he would not have borne with you. God has not only waited for you, but he has so often called you and invited you to pardon. *What is there that I ought to have done more?*[2] If God had stood in need of you, or if you had conferred a great favor upon him, could he show you greater mercy? If, then, you offend him again, you will change his mercy into wrath and vengeance.

If, after the master had given it another year to produce fruit, the fruitless fig-tree still remained barren, who could expect that the Lord would have allowed it more time, or would not have cut it down? Listen, then, to the admonition of St. Augustine: "O fruitless tree! the axe is deferred; be not secure: you will be cut down."[3] Your punishment, says the saint, has been delayed, but not taken away; if you abuse any longer the divine mercy, *You shall be cut down:* in the end vengeance will fall upon you. What do you wait for? Will you wait till God sends you to hell? But should he send you there, you already know that your ruin is irreparable! The Lord is silent, but he is not silent forever: when the time of vengeance arrives he no longer holds his peace. *These things hast thou done, and I was silent. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee. I will reprove thee, and set before thy face.*[4] I will place before your eyes the

[1] "Misericordiæ Domini, quia non sumus consumpti."—*Lam.* iii. 22.

[2] Quid est quod debui ultra facere?

[3] "Eia, arbor infructuosa, dilata est securis; noli esse secura, amputaberis."—*Serm.* 110, *E. B.*

[4] "Hæc fecisti, et tacui; existimasti, inique, quod ero tui similis; arguam te, et statuam contra faciem tuam."—*Ps.* xlix. 21.

mercies I have shown you, and will make these very mercies judge and condemn you.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! unhappy me, should I henceforth be unfaithful to Thee, and betray Thee again after the light Thou now givest me. This light is a sign that Thou wishest to pardon me. I repent, O Sovereign Good! of all the injuries I have done Thee because they have offended Thee, who art infinite goodness. In Thy blood I hope for pardon, and I hope for it with certainty; but should I again turn my back upon Thee, I would deserve a hell created on purpose for myself. And what makes me tremble, O God of my soul! is, that I may again lose Thy grace. I have so often promised to be faithful to Thee, and have afterward rebelled against Thee. Ah, Lord! do not permit it; do not ever abandon me to the great misfortune of seeing myself again Thy enemy. Send me any chastisement, but not this. *Do not permit me to be separated from Thee.* Shouldst Thou see that I shall again offend Thee, strike me dead, rather than permit so great an evil. I am content to suffer the most cruel death, sooner than have to weep over the misery of being again deprived of Thy grace. *Do not permit me to be separated from Thee.* I repeat this prayer, O my God: grant that I may repeat it always. *Do not permit me to be separated from Thee.*[1] I love Thee, my dear Redeemer! I do not wish to be separated from Thee. Through the merits of Thy death, give me an ardent love, which will bind me so closely to Thee, that I may never more be able to dissolve the union. O Mary, my mother! I fear that if I again offend God, thou too wilt abandon me. Assist me, then, by thy prayers; obtain for me holy perseverance and the love of Jesus Christ.

[1] Ne permittas me separari a te.

CONSIDERATION XVIII.

The Number of Sins.

"Because sentence is not speedily pronounced against the evil, the children of men commit evil without fear."—*Eccles.* viii. 11.

FIRST POINT.

The Measure is Determined for Each One.

If God instantly chastises the man who insults him, we certainly should not see him so much outraged as we do at present. But because the Lord does not instantly punish sinners, but waits for them, they are encouraged to offend him the more. It is necessary to understand that, though God waits and bears, he does not wait and bear forever. It is the opinion of many holy Fathers—of St. Basil, St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, and others—that as God (according to the words of Scripture, *Wis.* xi. 21, *Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number and weight*)[1] has fixed for each the number of his days, the degrees of health and talent which he will give to him, so he has also determined the number of sins that he will pardon; and when this number is completed, he will pardon no more. Eusebius of Cæsarea says the same thing: "God waits up to a certain number, and afterwards abandons;" and so speak also the above-mentioned Fathers.

And these Fathers have not spoken at random, but

[1] "Omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere, disposuisti."—*Wis.* xi. 21.

according to the sacred Scriptures. In one place the Lord says that he restrained his vengeance against the Amorrithes, because the number of their sins was not as yet filled up: *For as yet the iniquities of the Amorrithes are not at the full.*[1] In another place he says: *I will not add any more to have mercy on the house of Israel.*[2] Again he says: *All the men who have tempted Me ten times shall not see the land.*[3] *Thou hast*, says Job, *sealed up my offences as it were in a bag.*[4] Sinners keep no account of their sins; but God keeps an account of them, that when the harvest is ripe, that is, when the number of sins is completed, he may take vengeance on them. *Put ye in the sickles; for the harvest is ripe.*[5] In another place he says: *Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin to sin.*[6] As if he said: O sinner! you must tremble even on account of the sins which I have forgiven you; for if you add another, it may happen that this new sin, along with those which have been pardoned, may complete the number, and then there will be no more mercy for you. *The Lord waiteth patiently, that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them in the fulness of their sins.*[7] God waits till the measure of iniquities is filled up, and then he chastises the sinner.

Of such chastisements there are many examples in the Scriptures. Saul disobeyed God a second time, and was

1 "Necdum enim completæ sunt iniquitates Amorrhæorum."—*Gen.* xv. 16.

2 "Non addam ultra misereri domui Israel."—*Os.* i. 6.

3 "Tentaverunt me jam per decem vices . . .; non videbunt terram."—*Num.* xiv. 22.

4 "Gressus meos dinumerasti. . . . Signasti quasi in sacculo delicta mea."—*Job*, xiv. 16.

5 "Mittite falces, quoniam maturavit messis."—*Joel*, iii. 13.

6 "De propitiato peccato noli esse sine metu; neque adjicias peccatum super peccatum."—*Ecclus.* v. 5.

7 "Dominus patienter expectat, ut eas (nationes), cum judicii dies advenerit in plenitudine peccatorum puniat."—2 *Mac.* vi. 14.

abandoned. When he entreated Samuel to intercede for him, saying: *Bear, I beseech thee, my sin, and return with me that I may adore the Lord.*[1] Samuel answered: *I will not return with thee, because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee.*[2] We have also the example of Balthasar, who, after having profaned the vessels of the temple at table, saw a handwriting on the wall—*Mene, Thecel, Phares.* Daniel came, and in explaining these words, among other things, said: *Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.*[3] By these words he gave the king to understand that in the balance of divine justice the weight of his sins had made the scale descend. *The same night Balthasar, the Chaldean king, was killed.*[4] Oh! how many miserable sinners meet with a similar fate! They live many years, multiplying sins; but when the number is filled up, they are struck dead, and cast into hell! *They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell.*[5] There are some who spend their time in investigating the number of the stars, the number of the angels, or the number of years which each one will live. But who can discover the number of sins which God will pardon each individual? We should, therefore, tremble. My brother, it may be that God will pardon you no more after the first criminal pleasure which you indulge, after the first thought to which you consent, or after the first sin which you commit.

[1] Porta, quæso, peccatum meum, et revertere mecum, ut adorem Dominum.

[2] "Non revertar tecum, quia projecisti sermonem Domini, et projecit te Dominus."—1 *Kings*, xv. 25.

[3] "Appensus es in statera, et inventus es minus habens."—*Dan.* v. 27.

[4] Eadem nocte interfectus est Baltassar, rex chaldæus.

[5] "Ducunt in bonis dies suos, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt."—*Job*, xxi. 13.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah! my God! I thank Thee. How many for fewer sins than I have committed are now in hell! For them there is no pardon—no hope. And I am still living: I am not in hell: but, if I wish, I can hope for pardon and for Paradise. I am sorry above all things for all my sins, because by them I have offended Thee, who art infinite goodness. Eternal Father, *look on the face of Thy Christ;*[1] behold Thy Son dead on the cross for my sake; and through his merits have mercy on me. I wish to die rather than offend Thee any more. When I consider the sins I have committed, and the graces Thou hast bestowed upon me, I have just reason to fear that, if I commit another sin, the measure will be completed, and I shall be damned. Ah! assist me by Thy grace; from Thee I hope for light and strength to be faithful to Thee. And if Thou seest that I should again offend Thee, take me out of my life, now that I hope to be in a state of grace. My God! I love Thee above all things, and I feel a greater fear of incurring Thy enmity than of death. For Thy mercy's sake do not permit me any more to become Thy enemy. Mary, my Mother! have pity on me; assist me; obtain for me holy perseverance.

SECOND POINT.

The Measure is not the Same for All.

Some sinners say: But God is merciful. Who, I ask, denies it? The mercy of God is infinite; but though his mercy is infinite, how many are cast into hell every day? *The Lord hath sent Me to heal the contrite of heart.*[2] God heals those who have a good will. He pardons sins, but he cannot pardon the determination to commit sin. These sinners will also say: I am young. You are young; but God counts not years, but sins. The number of sins which God pardons is not the same for all: some he pardons a hundred; others a thousand sins; others he sends to hell after the second sin. How many has the Lord con-

[1] "Respice in faciem Christi tui."—*Ps.* lxxxiii. 10.

[2] "Misit me, ut mederer contritis corde."—*Isa.* lxi. 1.

demned to eternal misery after the first sin? St. Gregory[1] relates that a child of five years, for uttering a blasphemy was condemned to hell. The Most Holy Virgin revealed to that great servant of God, Benedicta of Florence, that a girl twelve years old was damned after her first sin. A boy of eight years died after his first sin, and was lost. In the Gospel of St. Matthew we find that the Lord instantly cursed the fig-tree the first time he saw it without fruit. *May no fruit grow on thee forever. And immediately the fig-tree withered away.*[2] Another time God said: *For three crimes of Damascus, and for four, I will not convert it.*[3] Perhaps some daring sinner may have the temerity to demand an account of God why he pardons some three sins, but not four. In this we must adore the judgments of God, and say with the apostle: *O the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, and of the knowledge of God! how incomprehensible are His judgments and unsearchable His ways!*[4] "The Lord," says St. Augustine, "knows whom he spares and whom he does not spare. To those who receive mercy he gives it gratuitously; from those who do not receive mercy, it is justly withheld."[5]

The obstinate sinner may say: But I have so often offended God, and he has pardoned me; I also hope he will pardon me the sin which I intend to commit. But, I ask, must God spare you forever, because he has not hitherto chastised you? The measure shall be filled up, and vengeance shall come. Samson continued to allow himself to be deluded by Dalila, hoping that, as on

[1] *Dial.* l. 4. c. 18.

[2] "Nunquam ex te fructus nascatur."—*Matt.* xxi. 19.

[3] "Super tribus sceleribus Damasci, et super quatuor non convertam eum."—*Amos*, i. 3.

[4] "O altitudo divitiarum sapientiæ et scientiæ Dei! Quam incomprehensibilia sunt judicia ejus, et investigabiles viæ ejus!"—*Rom.* xi. 33.

[5] "Quibus datur misericordia, gratuita datur; quibus non datur, juste Dei judicio non datur."—*Ep.* 217, *c.* 5, *E. B.*

former occasions, he would escape from the Philistines. *I will go out as I did before, and shake myself.*[1] But at last he was taken, and lost his life. *Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? Say not*, says the Lord, *I have committed so many sins, and God has not chastised me; for the Most High is a patient rewarder*,[2] that is, he will one day come and punish all; and the greater the mercy which he will have shown, the more severe shall be the chastisement which he will inflict. St. Chrysostom says, that God should be dreaded more when he bears with the obstinate sinner, than when he punishes him suddenly.[3] Because, according to St. Gregory, if they remain ungrateful, God punishes with the greatest rigor those whom he waits for with the greatest patience.[4] And it often happens, adds the saint, that they whom God has borne with for a long time, die unexpectedly, and without time for repentance.[5] And the greater the light which God will have given, the greater will be your blindness and obstinacy in sin. *For it had been better for them not to have known the way of justice, than, after they have known it, to turn back.*[6] And St. Paul says, that it is morally impossible for a soul that sins after being enlightened, to be again converted. *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gifts, . . . and are fallen away, to be renewed to penance.*[7]

[1] "Egrediar sicut ante feci, et me excutiam."—*Judges*, xvi. 20.

[2] "Ne dicas: Peccavi, et quid accidit mihi triste? Altissimus enim est patiens redditor."—*Ecclus.* v. 4.

[3] Plus timendum est cum tolerat, quam cum festinanter punit.

[4] "Quos diu tolerat, durius damnat."—*In Evang. hom.* 13.

[5] "Sæpe, qui diu tolerati sunt, subita morte rapiuntur, ut nec fiere ante mortem liceat."—*Mor.* l. 15, c. 19.

[6] "Melius enim erat illis non cognoscere viam justitiæ, quam post agnitionem retrorsum converti."—2 *Pet.* ii. 21.

[7] "Impossibile est enim eos, qui semel sunt illuminati, gustaverunt etiam donum cœleste . . . et prolapsi sunt, rursus renovari ad pœnitentiam."—*Heb* vi. 4.

The threats of the Lord against those who are deaf to his calls, are truly alarming, *Because I have called, and you have refused, . . . I also will laugh at your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared*[1] Mark the words—I *also:* they mean that as the sinner has mocked God by his confessions, by promising fidelity, and afterward betraying him; so the Lord will mock him at the hour of death. The wise man says: *As a dog that returned to the vomit, so is the fool that repeateth his folly.*[2] In explaining this text, Denis the Carthusian says, that as a dog that eats what he has just vomited is an object of disgust and abomination, so the sinner who relapses into sins which he has detested in the tribunal of penance, renders himself hateful in the sight of God.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold me, O my God! at Thy feet. I am that disgusting dog that has so often eaten the forbidden apples, which I before detested. I do not deserve mercy: but, O my Redeemer! the blood which Thou hast shed for me encourages and obliges me to hope for it. How often have I offended Thee and Thou hast pardoned me! I promised never more to offend Thee, and I have afterward returned to the vomit and Thou hast again pardoned me! What do I wait for? Is it that Thou mayest send me to hell, or that Thou mayest abandon me into the hand of my sins, which would be a greater punishment than hell? No, my God! I wish to amend and in order to be faithful to Thee, I will put all my confidence in Thee. I will, whenever I am tempted, always and instantly have recourse to Thee. Hitherto I have trusted in my promises and resolutions, and have neglected to recommend myself to Thee in my temptations: this has been the cause of my ruin. Henceforth Thou shalt be my hope and my strength, and thus I shall be able to do all things.

[1] "Quia vocavi, et renuistis . . . ego quoque, in interitu vestro, ridebo et subsannabo."—*Prov.* i. 24.

[2] "Sicut canis qui revertitur ad vomitum suum, sic imprudens qui iterat stultitiam suam."—*Prov.* xxvi. 11.

I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.[1] Give me grace then, O my Jesus, through Thy merits, to recommend myself to Thee, and to ask Thy aid in my wants. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good, amiable above every good: I wish to love Thee alone; but it is from Thee I must receive aid to love Thee. O Mary, my Mother! do thou also assist me by thy intercession; keep me under thy protection, and make me always invoke thee when I am tempted. Thy name shall be my defence.

THIRD POINT.

We Must Always Fear.

My son, hast thou sinned? do so no more; but, for thy former sins, pray that they may be forgiven thee.[2] Behold, dear Christian, the advice which your good Lord gives you because he desires your salvation. Son, offend me no more: but from this day forward be careful to ask pardon for your past transgressions. My brother, the more you have offended God, the more you should tremble at the thought of offending him again; for the next sin which you commit will make the balance of divine justice descend, and you will be lost. I do not say absolutely that after another sin there will be no more forgiveness for you; for this I do not know: but I say that it may happen. Hence, when you are tempted, say within yourself: Perhaps God will pardon me no more, and I shall be lost. Tell me; were it probable that certain food contained poison, would you eat it? If you had reason to think that on a certain road your enemies lay in wait to take away your life, would you pass that way as long as you could find another more free from danger? And what security, or even what probability, have you that if you relapse into sin, you will afterward repent sincerely of it; and that you will not return again

[1] "Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat."—*Phil.* iv. 13.

[2] "Fili, peccasti? non adjicias iterum; sed et de pristinis deprecare, ut tibi dimittantur."—*Ecclus.* xxi. 1.

to the vomit? What just reason have you to believe that God will not strike you dead in the very act of sin, or that, after your sin, he will not abandon you?

If you purchase a house, you spare no pains to obtain all the securities necessary to guard against the loss of your money; if you take medicine, you are careful to assure yourself that it cannot injure you; if you pass over a torrent, you cautiously avoid all danger of falling into it; and for a miserable gratification, for a beastly pleasure, you will risk your eternal salvation, saying: I expect to go to confession after this sin. But when, I ask, will you go to confession? Perhaps on Sunday. And who has promised that you will live till Sunday? Perhaps you intend to go to confession to-morrow? But who promised you to-morrow? "Do you cling," says St. Augustine, "to a day, who are not sure of an hour?" [1] How can you promise yourself that you will go to confession to-morrow, when you know not whether you will be among the living in another hour? "He, continues the saint, "who has promised pardon to penitents, has not promised to-morrow to sinners; perhaps he will give it, and perhaps he will not." [2] If you now commit sin, God, perhaps, will give you time for repentance, and perhaps he will not; and should he not give it, what will become of you for all eternity? In the mean time, by consenting to sin, you lose your soul for the sake of a miserable pleasure, and expose yourself to the risk of being lost forever. Would you, for that vile gratification, risk a sum of one thousand ducats? Would you, for that momentary pleasure, expose to danger your all —your money, your houses, your possessions, your liberty and life? Surely you would not. Will you then, for that wretched delight, lose all—your soul, heaven, and

[1] Diem tenes, qui horam non tenes?

[2] Qui pœnitenti veniam spopondit, peccanti diem crastinum non promisit; fortasse dabit, fortasse non dabit.

God? Do you believe that heaven, hell, and eternity are truths of faith, or that they are fables? Do you believe that if death overtake you in sin, you will be lost forever? Oh, what temerity! what folly! to condemn yourself by your own free act to an eternity of torments with the hope of afterward reversing the sentence of your condemnation. No one is so foolish as to take poison with the hope of being preserved from death; and will you condemn yourself to eternal death, saying, I will, perhaps, be hereafter delivered from it? O folly, which has brought, and brings, so many souls to hell! *Thou hast*, says the Lord, *trusted in thy wickedness. . . . Evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not know the rising thereof.*[1] You have sinned through a rash confidence in the divine mercy: vengeance will unexpectedly fall upon you, and you will not know whence it comes.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O Lord! one of those fools who have so often lost their soul and Thy grace with the hope of afterward recovering them. And hadst Thou struck me dead in those nights in which I was in sin, what would have become of me? I thank Thy mercy, which has waited for me, and which now makes me sensible of my folly. I see that Thou desirest my salvation; and I too wish to save my soul. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having so often turned my back upon Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart. And I hope in the merits of Thy Passion. O my Jesus! that I will never again be one of those fools. Pardon me at this moment, and give me the gift of Thy grace. I will never leave Thee again. *In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded.*[2] Ah no; I hope, O my Redeemer! never more to suffer the misfortune and confusion of seeing myself deprived of Thy grace and love. Grant me holy perseverance,

[1] "Fiduciam habuisti in malitia tua . . .; veniet super te malum, et nescies ortum ejus."—*Isa.* xlvii. 10, 11.

[2] "In te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in æternum."—*Ps.* xxx. 2

and give me the grace always to ask it of Thee by invoking Thy holy name and the name of Thy Mother, and by saying: Jesus assist me; most holy Mary! pray for me. Yes, my Queen, if I have recourse to thee, I shall never be conquered. And when the temptation continues, obtain for me the grace not to cease to invoke thy aid.

CONSIDERATION XIX.

The State of Grace and of Disgrace with God.

"Man knoweth not the price thereof."—*Job*, xxviii. 13.

FIRST POINT.

Dignity to which the Grace of God raises us.

If, says the Lord, *thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.*[1] They who know how to distinguish what is precious from what is vile, are like God, "who knows how to refuse the evil and to choose the good." Let us examine how great a good it is to be in the grace of God, and how great an evil to be in enmity with God. Men do not understand the value of divine grace. *Man knoweth not the price thereof.*[2] Hence, they exchange it for vanity, for a little earth, or for a beastly pleasure; but it is an infinite treasure, which makes us worthy of the friendship of God. *For*, says the Wise Man, *she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use become the friends of God.*[3] Hence, a soul in grace is the friend of God. The Gentiles, who were deprived of the light of faith, deemed it impossible for a creature to attain to the friendship of God; and they, who were guided only by the light of nature, could scarcely think otherwise; for, as St. Jerome says, "Friendship either finds or makes equals."[4] But God

[1] "Si separaveris pretiosum a vili quasi os meum eris."—*Jer.* xv. 19.

[2] "Nescit homo pretium ejus."—*Job*, xxviii. 13.

[3] "Infinitus enim thesaurus est hominibus: quo qui usi sunt, participes facti sunt amicitiæ Dei."—*Wisd.* vii. 14.

[4] "Amicitia pares aut accipit, aut facit."—*In Mich.* 7.

has declared in several places in the holy Scriptures, that by means of this grace we become his friends if we observe his law. *You are my friends if you do the things which I command. I will not now call you servants, . . but I have called you friends.*[1] Hence, St. Gregory exclaims: "O goodness of God! We do not deserve to be called even servants, and he condescends to call us friends."[2]

How fortunate would the man esteem himself, who should have the king for his friend! In a vassal, it would be temerity to presume to seek the friendship of his sovereign; but it is not temerity in a soul to aspire to the friendship of its God. St. Augustine[3] relates that two courtiers entered into a monastery of hermits, and that one of them began to read the life of St. Antony the Abbot. He read, and in reading his heart became gradually divested of worldly affections. Turning to his companion, he said "What do we seek? We can hope for nothing more than the friendship of the emperor. And through how many perils do we reach this greater danger? And how long will this last?" Friend, fools that we are, what do we seek? The most we can expect to gain in the service of the emperor is, to become his friends: and should we succeed in gaining his friendship, we shall expose our eternal salvation to greater risk. It is with difficulty we can ever become the friends of Cæsar: "but, if I wish, I am this moment the friend of God."

Whosoever, then, is in the state of grace is the friend of God. He also becomes the son of God: *You are gods, and the sons of the Most High.*[4] This is the great gift which we have received from the divine love through

[1] "Vos amici mei estis, si feceritis quæ ego præcipio vobis. Jam non dicam vos servos . . . vos autem dixi amicos."—*John*, xv. 14.

[2] "O mira divinæ bonitatis dignatio! Servi non sumus digni nominari, et amici vocamur."—*In Evang. hom.* 27.

[3] *Conf.* l. 8, c. 6.

[4] "Ecce dii estis, et filii Excelsi omnes."—*Ps.* lxxxi. 6.

Jesus Christ. *Behold*, says St. John, *what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us—that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God*[1] Moreover, the soul in the state of grace is the spouse of God. *I will espouse thee to me in faith.*[2] Hence the father of the prodigal, when his son returned, ordered a ring to be put on his finger, in token of his espousal. Lastly, the soul becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost. Sister Mary d'Oignies saw a devil go out from an infant who was receiving baptism, and the Holy Ghost enter with a multitude of angels.

Affections and Prayers.

Therefore my God! when my soul had the happiness of being in Thy grace, it was Thy friend, Thy child, Thy spouse, and Thy temple; but, by committing sin, it lost all, and became Thy enemy and the slave of hell. But I thank Thee, O my God, for giving me time to recover Thy grace. I am sorry above all things for having offended Thee, O infinite Goodness! and I love Thee above all things. Ah! receive me again into Thy friendship. For Thy mercy's sake do not reject me. I know that I deserve to be banished from Thy face; but, by the sacrifice which He offered on Calvary, Jesus Christ has merited for me mercy and pardon. *Thy kingdom come.* My Father (it is thus Thy Son has taught me to call Thee),—My Father, come with Thy grace to reign in my heart; grant that I may serve Thee alone, that I may live for Thee alone, and that I may love Thee alone. *And lead us not into temptation.* Ah! do not permit my enemies to tempt me so that I may be conquered. *But deliver us from evil.* Deliver me from hell; but deliver me first from sin, which alone can lead me to hell. O Mary! pray for me, and preserve me from the great misfortune of ever seeing myself in sin and deprived of the grace of thy and my God.

[1] "Videte qualem charitatem dedit nobis Pater, ut filii Dei nominemur, et simus."—1 *John*, iii. 1.

[2] "Sponsabo te mihi in fide."—*Osee*, ii. 20.

SECOND POINT.

Advantages that the Grace of God Procures for us.

St. Thomas of Aquino says that the gift of grace surpasses every gift that a creature can receive, since it is a participation of the divine nature.[1] And before him, St. Peter said the same: "*that by these ye may be made partakers of the divine nature.*"[2] So great things Jesus Christ has merited for us by his Passion: he has communicated to us the same splendor that he received from the Father. *And the glory which Thou hast given to Me, I have given to them.*[3] In fine, a soul in the state of grace is one thing with God. *He*, says St. Paul, *that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.*[4] The Redeemer has said that in a soul that loves God, the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity dwell. *If any one love Me, my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and we will make our abode with him.*[5]

So great is the beauty of a soul in the state of grace, that God himself extols it. *How beautiful art thou! how beautiful art thou!*[6] The Lord appears never to take his eyes off the soul that loves him, nor to close his ears to its petitions. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just: and His ears unto their prayers.*[7] St. Bridget used to say that a man could not behold the beauty of a soul in the grace of God, without dying through joy. And St. Catharine of Sienna, seeing a soul in the state of grace, said that

[1] "Donum gratiæ excedit omnem facultatem naturæ creatæ, cum sit participatio divinæ naturæ."—1, 2, q 112, a 1.

[2] "Ut per hæc efficiamini divinæ consortes naturæ."—2 *Pet.* i. 4.

[3] "Et ego claritatem, quam dedisti mihi, dedi eis."—*John*, xvii. 22.

[4] "Qui adhæret Domino, unus spiritus est."—1 *Cor.* vi. 17.

[5] "Si quis diligit me. . . . Pater meus diliget eum, et ad eum veniemus, et mansionem apud eum faciemus."—*John*, xiv. 23.

[6] "Quam pulchra es, amica mea, quam pulchra es!"—*Cant.* iv. 1.

[7] "Oculi Domini super justos, et aures ejus ad preces eorum."—*Ps.* xxxiii. 16.

she would willingly have given her life to prevent that soul from losing such beauty. Hence she kissed the ground on which priests walked, because through them souls recover the grace of God.

How many treasures of merits can a soul in the state of grace acquire? Each moment it can merit an eternity of glory. St. Thomas teaches that every act of love merits for the soul eternal life.[1] Why then should we envy the great ones of the earth? If we are in the grace of God, we can constantly acquire far more greatness in heaven. A certain lay-brother of the Society of Jesus, as Father Patrignani relates in his Menologies, appeared after death, and said that he and Philip the Second, King of Spain, were in the enjoyment of glory; but that his glory in heaven was as far superior to that of Philip, as that monarch was raised above him on this earth. Moreover, he alone who has experienced it, can conceive the peace which a soul in the grace of God enjoys in this life. *O taste and see that the Lord is sweet.*[2] The words of the Lord cannot fail. *Much peace have they that love thy law.*[3] The peace of a soul that is united with God, surpasses all the pleasures that the senses and the world can give. *The peace of God which surpasseth all understanding.*[4]

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus! Thou art the good pastor, who allowed Thyself to be slaughtered in order to give life to Thy sheep. When I fled away from Thee, Thou didst not cease to follow and seek after me; Thou receivest me now that I seek Thee, and cast myself with a penitent heart at Thy feet. Give me again Thy grace, which I have miserably lost through my own fault. I

[1] "Quilibet actus charitatis meretur vitam æternam."—1, 2, q. 114, a. 7.

[2] "Gustate, et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus."—*Ps.* xxxiii. 9.

[3] "Pax multa diligentibus legem tuam."—*Ps.* cxviii. 165.

[4] "Pax Dei, quæ exsuperat omnem sensum."—*Phil.* iv. 7.

am sorry for it with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow at the thought of having so often turned my back on Thee. Pardon me through the merits of the painful death which Thou didst suffer for me on the cross. Bind me with the sweet chains of Thy love, and do not permit me ever more to fly away from Thee. Since I have merited the eternal torments of hell, give me strength to bear with patience all the crosses which Thou sendest me. Since I have deserved to be for eternity under the feet of the devils, make me embrace with love all the contempt and insults which I shall receive from men. Finally, make me obedient to all Thy holy inspirations, and give me grace to conquer all human respect for the love of Thee. I am resolved henceforward to serve Thee only: let others say what they please, I will serve Thee alone, O my most amiable God! Thee only do I wish to please. But give me Thy aid, without which I can do nothing. I love Thee, O my Jesus! with my whole heart, and I trust in Thy blood. Mary, my hope! assist me by thy prayers. I glory in being thy servant, and thou dost glory in saving sinners who have recourse to thee. Come to my relief and save me.

THIRD POINT.

Enmity with God.

Let us now see the misery of a soul that is in enmity with God. It is separated from God, his sovereign good. *Your iniquities*, says the prophet Isaias, *have divided between you and your God.*[1] Hence the soul is no longer his, and he is no longer its God. *You are not my people and I will not be yours.*[2] The soul not only belongs no longer to God, but God even hates it and condemns it to hell. God does not hate any of his creatures; he does not hate the wild beast, the viper, or the toad. *Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast*

[1] "Iniquitates vestræ diviserunt inter vos et Deum vestrum."—*Isa.* lix. 2.

[2] "Vos non populus meus, et ego non ero vester."—*Os.* i. 9.

made.[1] But he cannot refrain from hating sinners. *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity.*[2] Yes; God cannot but hate sin, which is diametrically opposed to his will; and in hating sin he must necessarily hate the sinner who is united to his sin. *But to God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike.*[3]

O God! if a man has for his enemy a monarch of the earth, he cannot sleep, he is every moment in dread of death. And how can he who is the enemy of God enjoy peace? He may escape the vengeance of his sovereign by concealing himself in a wood, or by taking refuge in a distant country. But who can fly from the hands of God? *Lord*, says David, *if I shall ascend into heaven, if I shall hide myself in hell, wheresoever I go, Thy hand can reach me. If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present. . . . Even there also shall Thy hand lead me.*[4]

Poor sinners! they are cursed by God, cursed by the angels, cursed by the saints, cursed also every day on earth by all priests and religious, who, in reciting the divine office, proclaim them accursed. *They are cursed who decline from thy commandments.*[5] Moreover, the soul that is at enmity with God has lost all its merits. Should a man be equal in merit to St. Paul the Hermit, who lived forty-eight years in a cave; to St. Francis Xavier, who gained ten millions of souls to God; or to St. Paul the Apostle, who, according to St. Jerome, surpassed in merit all the other apostles—that man, if he commit a

[1] "Diligis omnia quæ sunt, et nihil odisti eorum quæ fecisti."—*Wis.* xi. 25.

[2] "Odisti omnes qui operantur iniquitatem."—*Ps.* v. 7.

[3] "Similiter autem odio sunt Deo impius et impietas ejus."—*Wis.* xiv. 9.

[4] "Si ascendero in cœlum, tu illic es; si descendero in infernum, ades . . . ; etenim illuc manus tua deducet me."—*Ps.* cxxxviii. 8, 10.

[5] "Maledicti, qui declinant a mandatis tuis."—*Ps.* cxviii. 21.

single mortal sin, loses all. *All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered.*[1] Behold the ruin which the enmity of God produces: it transforms the child of God into the slave of Lucifer; his beloved friend into an enemy whom he sovereignly hates; and the heir of heaven into one condemned to hell. St. Francis de Sales used to say that, were the angels capable of weeping they should shed tears of pity at the sight of a soul that commits mortal sin and loses the divine grace.

But the greatest misery is that the angels would, if it were in their power, weep; and the sinner weeps not. "A Christian," says St. Augustine, "if he loses a sheep or any other valuable animal, weeps over the loss, and neither eats nor sleeps; but when he loses the grace of God, he eats and sleeps, and sheds not a single tear.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O my Redeemer! the miserable state to which I have brought myself. To make me worthy of Thy grace, Thou didst spend thirty-three years in toil and pains; and I, for the poisoned pleasure of a moment, have despised and lost it. I thank Thy mercy, which still gives me time to recover it if I wish. Yes, I wish to do everything in my power to regain it. Tell me what I must do in order to obtain Thy pardon. Dost Thou wish me to repent? O my Jesus! I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thy infinite Goodness. Dost Thou wish me to love Thee? I love Thee above all things. Hitherto I have unfortunately employed my heart in loving creatures and vanities. From this day forward I will live only for Thee; I will love only Thee my God, my treasure, my hope, my strength. *I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength.*[2] Thy merits, Thy wounds, O my Jesus! shall be my hope and my strength; from Thee I hope for strength to be faithful to Thee. Give me then,

[1] "Omnes justitiæ ejus, quas fecerat, non recordabuntur."—*Ezek.* xviii. 24.

[2] "Diligam te, Deus, fortitudo mea."—*Ps.* xvii. 2.

O my Redeemer! the gift of Thy grace, and do not permit me ever again to depart from Thee. Divest my soul of all worldly affections, and inflame my heart with Thy holy love. Kindle in it the fire of Thy love. Mary, my Mother! who wert always on fire with divine love, make me burn like thee with the love of God.

CONSIDERATION XX.

The Folly of the Sinner.

"For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God."—1 *Cor.* iii. 19.

FIRST POINT.

The Large Number of Fools.

THE Venerable John Avila would have divided the world into two prisons, one for the incredulous, the other for Christians who live in sin at a distance from God. The prison of the latter he would have called the prison of fools. But the greatest misery and misfortune is, that these miserable men esteem themselves wise and prudent, though they are the most foolish and imprudent of mortals. And unfortunately they are exceedingly numerous. *The number of fools is infinite.*[1] Some are foolish through love of honors; some for the sake of pleasures; and others from attachment to the miserable goods of this earth. And great as their folly is, they have the temerity to call the saints fools, because they despise the goods of this life in order to gain eternal salvation and the possession of God, who is the true and supreme good. They deem it folly to embrace contempt, and to pardon injuries; folly to abstain from sensual pleasures, and to practise mortification; folly to renounce honors and riches, to love solitude and an humble and hidden life. But they never reflect that the Lord has called their wisdom folly. *For*, says the apostle, *the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God.*[2]

[1] "Et stultorum infinitus est numerus."—*Eccles.* i. 15.

[2] "Sapientia enim hujus mundi stultitia est apud Deum."—1 *Cor.* iii. 19.

Ah! they will one day confess their folly; but when? When there will be no remedy for it. They will then say in despair: *We fools esteemed their life madness and their end without honor.*[1] Ah! fools that we have been! we regarded the lives of the saints as folly; but now we know that we have been miserably foolish. *Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints.*[2] Behold how they have obtained a place among the happy number of the children of God, and have secured their lot among the saints—an eternal lot, which will make them happy for eternity; and we are among the number of the slaves of the devil, condemned to burn in this pit of torments for all eternity. *Therefore we have erred*, thus they shall conclude their lamentation, *from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us.*[3] Then we have erred by shutting our eyes to God's light; and what renders our condition still more forlorn is, that for our error there is no remedy, and there will be none as long as God will be God.

How great then the folly of sinners, who, for a worthless gain, for a little smoke, for a transient delight, lose the grace of God! What would not a vassal do in order to gain the favor of his sovereign? O God! for a miserable gratification, to lose God, the supreme Good! to lose paradise! to forfeit peace in this life, by bringing into the soul the monster sin, which, by its remorse, will torture it unceasingly! and to condemn yourself voluntarily to everlasting woe! Would you indulge in that forbidden pleasure if, in punishment, your hand was to be burned? or if you were to be shut up for a year in a grave?

[1] "Nos insensati vitam illorum æstimabamus insaniam, et finem illorum sine honore."—*Wis* v. 4.

[2] "Ecce quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei, et inter sanctos sors illorum est."—*Wis.* v. 5.

[3] "Ergo erravimus a via veritatis, et justitiæ lumen non luxit nobis."—*Wis.* v. 6.

Would you commit that sin, if after consenting to it, you should forfeit a hundred crowns? And still you believe and know that in yielding to sin, you lose heaven and God, and that you are condemned to eternal fire: and after all you transgress the divine law.

Affections and Prayers.

O God of my soul! what should be my lot at this moment, if Thou hadst not shown me so many mercies? I should be in hell among the number of the foolish to which I have belonged. I thank Thee, O my Lord! and I entreat Thee not to abandon me in my blindness, I feel that Thou tenderly callest and invitest me to ask pardon, and to hope for great graces from Thee, after the insults I have offered to Thee. Yes, my Saviour! I hope Thou wilt admit me among Thy children: I am not worthy to be called Thy child, after having so often insulted Thee to Thy face. *Father, I am not worthy to be called Thy child: I have sinned against heaven and before Thee.*[1] But I know that Thou goest in search of the strayed sheep, and that Thou feelest consolation in embracing Thy lost children. My dear Father! I am sorry for having offended Thee. I cast myself at Thy feet, and embrace them; I will not depart till Thou pardon and bless me. *I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.*[2] Bless me, O my Father! and let the fruit of Thy benediction be, a great sorrow for my sins, and a great love for Thee. I love Thee, O my Father! I love Thee with my whole heart. Do not permit me ever more to depart from Thee. Deprive me of all; but do not strip me of Thy love. O Mary! if God is my Father, thou art my Mother. Do thou also bless me. I do not deserve to be thy son: accept me for thy servant; but make me a servant who will always love thee tenderly and always confide in thy protection.

SECOND POINT.

Great Folly.

Poor sinners! they labor and toil for the attainment of worldly sciences, or the art of gaining the goods of

[1] "Pater, peccavi in cœlum et coram te: jam non sum dignus vocari filius tuus."—*Luke*, xv. 18.

[2] "Non dimittam te, nisi benedixeris mihi."—*Gen.* xxxii. 26.

this life, which will soon end, and neglect the goods of the next life, which is everlasting! They lose their reason to such a degree, that they become not only fools, but senseless beasts; for, living like brute animals, they attend not to what is lawful or unlawful, but only follow the beastly instincts of the senses, and embrace what is pleasing to the flesh, without ever reflecting on what they lose, or on the eternal ruin which they bring upon themselves. To live in this manner is, to act not like a man, but like a senseless beast. St. John Chrysostom says: "We call him a man who preserves intact the image of man; but what is this image of man: To be rational."[1] To be a man is, to be rational—that is, to act according to reason, and not according to the sensual appetite. Were beasts to receive from God the use of reason, and to act according to its dictates, we should say that they acted like men; and, on the other hand, when a man follows the impulse of the senses in opposition to reason, it must be said he acts like a beast.

O that they would be wise, and would understand, and would provide for their last end.[2] He who acts according to the rules of prudence, looks to the future—that is, to what must happen at the end of life—to death and judgment, and after judgment, hell or heaven. Oh! how much wiser is the peasant who saves his soul, than the monarch who brings himself to hell. *Better is a child who is poor and wise, than a king that is old and foolish, who knoweth not to foresee hereafter.*[3] O God! would not all pronounce the man to be a fool, who, in order to gain a shilling, would risk his entire property? And will he

[1] "Hominem illum dicimus, qui imaginem hominis salvam retinet: quæ autem est imago hominis? Rationalem esse."—*In Gen. hom.* 23.

[2] "Utinam saperent, et intelligerent, et novissima providerent!"—*Deut.* xxxii. 29.

[3] "Melior est puer pauper et sapiens, rege sene et stulto, qui nescit prævidere in posterum."—*Eccles.* iv. 13.

not be considered foolish, who, for a momentary gratification, forfeits the grace of God, and exposes his soul to the danger of eternal perdition? The care of present, and the total neglect of eternal goods and evils, is the ruin of the immense multitude of the damned.

God has certainly not placed us in this world to become rich, or acquire honors, or to indulge our senses, but to gain eternal life. *But the end life everlasting.*[1] And nothing but the attainment of this end is of importance to us. *One thing is necessary.*[2] But there is nothing that sinners despise more than this end: they think only of the present; they each day walk toward death, and approach the gate of eternity, but know not whither they are going. "What would you think," says St. Augustine, "of a pilot, who, when asked where he is going should answer, that he did not know? Would not all exclaim, that he is bringing the ship to ruin? Such," adds the saint, "is the man who runs out of the way."[3] Such are the wise of the world, who know how to acquire wealth, to indulge in amusements, to gain posts of honor and emolument, but know not how to save their souls. The rich glutton knew how to lay up wealth; but *he died, and was buried in hell.*[4] Alexander the Great knew how to acquire many kingdoms; but in a few years he died, and was lost forever. Henry VIII. knew how to preserve his throne by rebelling against the Church; but seeing at death that he lost his soul, he exclaimed: *We have lost all.* How many miserable sinners now weep and cry out in hell: *What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? all those*

[1] "Finem vero vitam æternam."—*Rom.* vi. 22.

[2] "Porro unum est necessarium."—*Luke*, x. 42.

[3] "Fac hominem perdidisse quo tendit, et dicatur ei: Quo is?—Et dicat: Nescio.—Nonne iste navem ad naufragium perducit? Talis est qui currit præter viam."—*In Ps.* 31, *enarr.* 2

[4] "Mortuus est, . . . et sepultus est in inferno."—*Luke*, xvi. 22.

things are passed away like a shadow.[1] Behold, they exclaim, for us all the goods of the world have passed away like a shadow, and nothing remains but eternal wailing and everlasting torments.

Before man is life and death, that which he shall choose shall be given him.[2] Beloved Christian, God places before you in this world, life and death—that is, the voluntary privation of forbidden pleasures, by which you will gain eternal life; or the indulgence of them, by which you merit everlasting death. What do you say? What choice do you make? In making the choice, act like a man, and not like a senseless beast. Act like a Christian who believes in the Gospel and says: *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul?*[3]

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! Thou hast given me reason, Thou hast given me the light of faith, and I have acted like a senseless beast, by losing Thy grace for the miserable pleasure of the senses, which have passed away like air; and now I find nothing but remorse of conscience, and debts to Thy divine justice. *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant.*[4] Ah, Lord! judge me not according to my merits, but treat me according to Thy mercy. Give me light, give me sorrow for the offences that I have committed against Thee, and pardon me. "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost: seek thy servant." I am a lost sheep: and unless Thou seek after me, I shall be lost forever. Have pity on me for the sake of that blood which Thou hast shed for me. I am sorry, O Sovereign Good! for having left Thee, and for having voluntarily renounced Thy grace. I would wish to die of sorrow, but give me an increase of sorrow. Bring me to heaven

[1] "Quid nobis profuit superbia, aut divitiarum jactantia? Transierunt omnia illa tamquam umbra."—*Wis.* v. 8.

[2] "Ante hominem vita et mors . . . ; quod placuerit ei, dabitur illi."—*Ecclus.* xv. 18.

[3] "Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur?"—*Matt.* xvi. 26.

[4] "Non intres in judicium cum servo tuo."—*Ps.* cxlii. 2.

that there I may sing Thy mercies. Mary, my Mother! thou art my refuge; pray to Jesus for me: beg of him to grant me pardon and holy perseverance.

THIRD POINT.

True Wisdom.

Let us be persuaded that the truly wise are they who know how to acquire the divine grace, and the kingdom of heaven; and let us incessantly implore the Lord to give us the science of the saints, which he gives to all who ask it from him.[1] Oh! what a precious science to know how to love God, and to save our souls! This science consists in knowing how to walk in the way of salvation, and to adopt the means of attaining eternal life. The affair of salvation is of all affairs the most necessary. If we know all things, and know not how to save our souls, our knowledge will be unprofitable to us, and we shall be forever miserable: but on the other hand, though we should be ignorant of all things, we shall be happy for eternity, if we know how to love God. "Blessed is the man," says St. Augustine, "who knows Thee though he be ignorant of other things."[2] One day, Brother Giles said to St. Bonaventure: Happy you, Father Bonaventure, who are so learned. I am a poor, ignorant man, who knows nothing. You can become more holy than I can. "Listen," replied the saint: "If an ignorant old woman love God more than I do, she shall be more holy than I am." On hearing this, Brother Giles began to exclaim: O poor old woman! poor old woman! listen, listen: if you love God, you can become more holy than Father Bonaventure.

"The unlearned rise up," says St. Augustine: "and bear away the kingdom of heaven."[3] How many rude

[1] "Dedit illi scientiam sanctorum."—*Wis.* x. 10.

[2] "Beatus, qui te scit, etiam si alia nesciat."—*Conf.* l. 5, c. 4.

[3] "Surgunt indocti, et cœlum rapiunt."—*Conf.* l. 8, c. 8.

and illiterate Christians, who, though unable to read, know how to love God and are saved! And how many of the learned of this world are damned! But the former, not the latter, are truly wise. Oh! how truly wise were St. Paschal, St. Felix the Capuchin, St. John of God, though unacquainted with human sciences! Oh! how truly wise were so many holy men, who, abandoning the world, shut themselves up in the cloister, or spent their lives in the desert! How truly wise were St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Louis of Toulouse, who renounced the throne! Oh! how truly wise were so many martyrs, so many tender virgins, who refused the hand of princes, and suffered death for the sake of Jesus Christ! That true wisdom consists in despising the goods of this life, and in securing a happy eternity, even worldlings know and believe: hence of persons who give themselves to God, they say: Happy they, who are truly wise, and save their souls! In fine, they who renounce the goods of the world to give themselves to God, are said to be undeceived. What then should we call those who abandon God for worldly goods? We should call them deluded men.

Brother, to what class do you wish to belong? In order to make a good choice, St. Chrysostom tells you to visit the sepulchres of the dead.[1] The grave is the school in which we may see the vanity of earthly goods, and in which we may learn the science of the saints. "Tell me," says St. Chrysostom, "are you able there to discover who has been a prince, a noble, or a man of learning? For my part," adds the saint, "I see nothing but rottenness, worms, and bones. All is but a dream, a shadow."[2] Everything in this world will soon have an end, and will vanish like a dream or a shadow. But, dearly beloved Christians, if you wish to be truly wise, it is not enough to know your end, it is necessary to

[1] Proficiscamur ad sepulchra.

[2] "Nihil video, nisi putredinem, ossa, et vermes. Omnia fabula, somnium, umbra."—*In Matth. hom.* 77.

adopt the means of attaining it. All would wish to be saved and to be saints; but because they do not employ the means, they never acquire sanctity, and are lost. It is necessary to fly from the occasions of sin, to frequent the sacraments, to practise mental prayer, and above all, to impress on the heart the following maxims of the Gospel: *What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world?*[1] *He that loveth his life shall lose it.*[2] That is, we must even forfeit our life in order to save the soul. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.*[3] To follow Jesus Christ it is necessary to refuse to self-love the pleasures which it seeks. *Life is His good will.*[4] Our salvation consists in doing the will of God. These, and other similar maxims, should be deeply impressed on the soul.

Affections and Prayers.

O Father of mercies! behold my miseries, and have pity on me; give me light, make me sensible of my past folly, that I may bewail it, and make known to me Thy infinite goodness, that I may love it. My Jesus! *do not deliver up to beasts the souls that confess to Thee.*[5] Thou hast expended Thy blood for my salvation: do not permit me ever more to be, as I have hitherto been, the slave of the devils. I am sorry, O my Sovereign Good! for having abandoned Thee. I curse all the moments in which I voluntarily consented to sin; and I embrace Thy holy will, which desires nothing but my welfare. Eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ, give me strength to do all that is pleasing to Thee. Strike me dead rather than permit me to oppose Thy holy will. Assist me by Thy grace to banish from my heart every affection which does not tend to Thee. I love Thee, O God of my soul! I love Thee above all things: and from Thee I hope for every good, for pardon, for perseverance in Thy love, and for paradise, that there I may love Thee for eternity. O Mary! ask these graces for me. Thy Son refuses thee nothing. My hope! I trust in thee.

[1] "Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur?"—*Matt.* xvi. 26.

[2] "Qui amat animam suam, perdet eam."—*John*, xii. 25.

[3] "Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum."—*Matt.* xvi. 24.

[4] "Vita in voluntate ejus."—*Ps.* xxix. 6.

[5] "Ne tradas bestiis animas confitentes tibi."—*Ps.* lxxiii. 19

CONSIDERATION XXI.

Unhappy Life of the Sinner: and Happy Life of him who loves God.

"There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord."—*Isa.* xlviii. 22.
"Much peace have they that love Thy law."—*Ps.* cxviii. 165.

FIRST POINT.

The World cannot make us Happy.

In this life all men seek after peace The merchant, the soldier, the man who goes to law, labor with the hope of making a fortune, and of thus finding peace, by worldly fortune, by a more exalted post, by gaining a lawsuit. But poor worldlings seek from the world that peace which the world cannot give. God alone can give us peace. The holy Church prays in the following words: "Give to Thy servants that peace which the world cannot give."[1] No; the world with all its goods cannot content the heart of man: for he was created not for them, but for God alone: hence God alone can make him happy and content. Brute animals, that have been made for sensual delights, find peace in earthly goods. Give to an ox a bundle of hay, and to a dog a piece of flesh, and they are content, they desire nothing more. But the soul that has been created for no other end than to love God, and to live in union with him, will never be able to find peace or happiness in sensual enjoyments: God alone can make it perfectly content.

[1] Da servis tuis illam, quam mundus dare non potest, pacem.

The Son of God gave the appellation of fool to the rich man who, after having reaped a rich harvest from his fields, said to himself: *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, and make good cheer.*[1] "Miserable fool!" says St. Basil, have you the soul of a swine, of a brute, that you expect to make it happy by eating, drinking, or by sensual delights?"[2] A man may be puffed up, but he cannot be satisfied, by the goods of this world. On the words of the Gospel, *behold we have left all things.*[3] St. Bernard writes, that he saw different classes of fools laboring under different species of folly. All had a great thirst for happiness: some were satiated with the goods of the earth, which is a figure of the avaricious; others with wind, the figure of the ambitious, who seek after empty honors: others seated round a furnace, swallowing the sparks that were thrown from it; these were the passionate and vindictive: others, in fine, drank putrid waters from a fetid lake: and these were the voluptuous and unchaste. Hence, turning to them, the saint exclaims: O fools! do you not see that these things increase, rather than diminish your thirst! The goods of the world are but apparent goods, and therefore they cannot satisfy the heart of man. *You have eaten,* says the Prophet Aggeus, *but have not had enough.*[4] Hence, the more the avaricious man possesses, the more he seeks to acquire. "The possession of great wealth," says St. Augustine, "does not close, but rather extends, the jaws of avarice."[5] The more the unchaste man wallows in the mire of impurity, the greater is his disgust, and, at the same time, his desire for such beastly

[1] "Anima, habes multa bona posita in annos plurimos; requiesce, comede, bibe."—*Luke,* xii. 19.

[2] Numquid animam porcinam habes?

[3] "Ecce nos reliquimus omnia."—*Matt.* xix. 27.

[4] "Comedistis, et non estis satiati."—*Agg.* i. 6.

[5] "Major pecunia avaritiæ fauces non claudit sed extendit."—*Serm.* 50, E. B.

pleasures; and how can dung and carnal filthiness content the heart? The same happens to the ambitious man, who wishes to satisfy his desires by smoke; for he always attends more to what he wants than to what he possesses. After having acquired many kingdoms, Alexander the Great wept, because he had not dominion over other countries. If worldly goods could content the human heart, the rich and the monarchs of the earth would enjoy complete happiness; but experience shows the contrary. Solomon tells us that he refused no indulgence to his senses. *Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not.*[1] But after all his sensual enjoyments what did he say? *Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity.*[2] That is, everything in this world is mere vanity, a pure lie, pure folly.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! what now remains of all the offences I have offered to Thee, but pain, bitterness, and merits for hell? I am not sorry for the pain and remorse which I now feel; on the contrary, they console me, because they are the gift of Thy grace, and make me hope that, since Thou inspirest these sentiments, Thou wishest to pardon me. What displeases me is the pain I have given Thee, my Redeemer, who loved me so tenderly. I deserved, O my Lord! to be abandoned by Thee; but, instead of abandoning me, I see that Thou offerest me pardon, and that Thou art the first to ask for a reconciliation. O my Jesus! I wish to make peace with Thee, and desire Thy grace more than every earthly good. I am sorry, O infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee; I would wish to die of sorrow for my offences. Ah! through the love which Thou didst entertain for me when Thou didst expire on the cross, pardon me, receive me into Thy heart, and change my heart, so that henceforth I may please Thee as much as I have hitherto offended Thee. I now renounce, for Thy sake, all the pleasures that the world can

[1] "Et omnia quæ desideraverunt oculi mei, non negavi eis."—*Eccles.* ii. 10.

[2] "Vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas."—*Ibid.* i. 2.

give me, and I resolve to forfeit my life rather than lose Thy grace. Tell me what I must do in order to please Thee; I wish to do it. What pleasures, what honors, what riches can I seek? I wish only for Thee, my God, my joy, my glory, my treasure, my life, my love, my all. Give me, O Lord! strength to be faithful to Thee. Give me the grace to love Thee, and then do with me what Thou pleasest. Mary, my Mother and my hope! take me under Thy protection, and obtain for me the grace to belong entirely to God.

SECOND POINT.

Interior Torments of the Sinner.

But, according to Solomon, the goods of this world not only do not content the heart, but they are even a source of pain and affliction of spirit. *And behold all is vanity and affliction of spirit.*[1] Poor sinners! they seek for happiness in their sins, but they find nothing but bitterness and remorse. *Destruction and happiness in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known.*[2] What peace? What peace? *There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord.*[3] In the first place, sin brings with it a dread of divine vengeance. The man that is beset with powerful enemies neither eats nor sleeps in peace. And can he who has God for his enemy enjoy repose? *Fear to them that work evil.*[4] When the man who is in the state of sin hears the roaring of thunder, oh! how does he tremble! Every leaf that moves excites terror. *The sound of dread is always in his ears.*[5] He is always flying away though no one pursues him. *The wicked man fleeth when no man pursueth.*[6] He is pursued by his own sin. After having killed his brother Abel, Cain

[1] "Ecce universa vanitas, et afflictio spiritus."—*Eccles.* i. 14.

[2] "Contritio et infelicitas in viis eorum, et viam pacis non cognoverunt."—*Ps.* xiii. 3.

[3] "Non est pax impiis."—*Isa.* xlviii. 22.

[4] "Pavor iis qui operantur malum."—*Prov.* x. 29.

[5] "Sonitus terroris semper in auribus illius."—*Job*, xv. 21.

[6] "Fugit impius, nemine persequente."—*Prov.* xxviii. 1.

said: *Every one therefore that findeth me, shall kill me.*[1] God assured him that no one should injure him. *And the Lord said to him: No; it shall not be so.*[2] But, notwithstanding this assurance, Scripture tells us that Cain *dwelt a fugitive on the earth.*[3] He was always flying from one place to another. And who, but his own sin, was the persecutor of Cain?

Sin also brings with it remorse of conscience, that cruel worm which unceasingly gnaws the soul. If the miserable sinner go to a festivity, to a comedy, to a place of amusement, his conscience will say to him, you are the enemy of God: should you die in your sin, where will you go? The torture of remorse of conscience is so great even in this life, that to free themselves from it, some have committed suicide. It is related of a certain man, who had killed an infant, that, in order to get rid of the stings of remorse, he entered into a monastery; but finding no peace even there, he went before a judge, confessed his crime, and was condemned to death.

What is a soul without God? The Holy Ghost compares it to a sea agitated by the tempest. *The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest.*[4] Were a person brought to a musical exhibition, or to a ball, and obliged to remain suspended by a cord, with his head downward, could he enjoy the entertainment? Such is the state of a man who lives in the enjoyment of worldly goods, but without God: his soul is as it were turned upside down. He may eat and drink and dance, he may wear costly apparel, and may acquire honors, dignities, and possessions; but he never will have peace. *There is no peace to*

[1] "Omnis igitur qui invenerit me, occidet me."—*Gen.* iv. 14.

[2] "Dixitque ei Dominus: Nequaquam ita fiet."—*Ibid.* ver. 15.

[3] "Habitavit profugus in terra."—*Ibid.*

[4] "Impii autem quasi mare fervens, quod quiescere non potest."—*Isai.* lvii. 20

the wicked.[1] God alone imparts peace; but he gives it to his friends, not to his enemies.

"The goods of this earth," says St. Vincent Ferrer, "do not enter the soul. They are waters which do not penetrate where there is thirst."[2] The sinner may wear embroidered robes and the richest jewels; he may indulge the palate as much as he pleases; but his poor soul will be full of thorns and gall; and therefore with all his riches, pleasures, and amusements, you will see him always unhappy and ready to fly into a rage and fury at every contradiction. He who loves God resigns himself to the divine will in adversity, and enjoys peace; but he who lives in opposition to the divine will, cannot conform to it, and therefore he has no means of tranquillizing the soul. The miserable man serves the devil, he serves a tyrant who repays him with gall and bitterness. Ah! the word of God can never fail. *Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy God with joy and gladness, thou shalt serve the enemy in hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and in want of all things.*[3] What do not the vindictive suffer after they have gratified their resentment? the unchaste, after they have attained their wicked object? What do not the ambitious, the avaricious, endure? Oh, how many are there, who, if they suffer for God as much as they suffer to bring themselves to their own damnation, would become great saints?

Affections and Prayers.

O my lost life! O my God! if to serve Thee I had suffered the pains which I have endured in order to offend Thee, how many merits should I now find treasured up for Paradise! Ah, my Lord! for what have I abandoned Thee, and lost Thy grace?

[1] Non est pax impiis.

[2] Sunt aquæ, quæ non intrant illuc, ubi est sitis.

[3] "Eo quod non servieris Domino Deo tuo in gaudio . . . servies inimico tuo . . . in fame, et siti, et nuditate, et omni penuria."—*Deut.* xxviii. 47, 48.

For poisoned and momentary pleasures, which, as soon as they were indulged, disappeared, and left my soul full of thorns and bitterness. Ah, my sins, I detest you, I curse you a thousand times. I bless Thy mercy, O my God! which has borne with me so patiently. I love Thee, O my Creator and Redeemer! who hast given Thy life for me; and because I love Thee, I am sorry with my whole heart for having offended Thee. My God, my God! why have I lost Thee? for what have I exchanged Thee? I now know the evil I have done; and I resolve to lose everything, even life, rather than lose Thy love. Give me light, O Eternal Father! for the sake of Jesus Christ: make known to me Thy greatness, and the nothingness of the goods which the devils present to me in order to make me lose Thy grace. I love Thee but I desire to love Thee with greater ardor. Grant that Thou alone may be my only thought, my only desire, my only love. I hope for all from Thy goodness, through the merits of Thy Son. Mary, my Mother! through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ, I entreat thee to obtain for me light and strength to serve him and to love him till death.

THIRD POINT.

Happiness of the Just on Earth.

Then all the goods and delights of this world cannot content the human heart. Who can satisfy all its desires? God alone. *Delight in the Lord and He will give thee the requests of thy heart.*[1] The heart of man is always in search of goods that will make him happy. He enjoys riches, pleasures, honors, and he is not content; for these are finite goods, and he was created for an infinite good. But, let him seek God, let him unite himself to God, and behold he is content, all his desires are satiated. *Delight in the Lord and He will give thee the requests of thy heart.*[1] During all the time which St Augustine spent in sensual delights, he never found peace. This he afterward confessed when he gave himself to God.

[1] "Delectare in Domino, et dabit tibi petitiones cordis tui."—*Ps.* xxxvi. 4.

"Our heart is restless till it rests in thee.'[1]" My God I know that all is vanity and affliction, and that Thou alone art the true peace of the soul. "All things are hard, and thou alone repose."[2] Hence he afterward wrote: "What do you seek, O miserable man? seek one good, in which are all goods."[3] While he was in sin, David went to his gardens, and indulged in the pleasures of the table and all other royal entertainments; but the table, the gardens, and the creatures in which he took delight, said to him: David, do you expect that we shall make you happy? It is not in our power to content your heart. *Where is your God?* Go and find your God; he alone can satisfy the cravings of your soul. Hence, in the midst of all his enjoyments, David wept continually. *My tears have been my bread day and night, while it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?*[4]

But, oh! how content and happy does God make the faithful souls that love him! After having left all for God, without shoes, almost naked, and dead from cold and hunger, St. Francis of Assisi enjoyed a paradise in saying "My God and my all." After he had become a religious, St. Francis Borgia was obliged, in travelling, often to lie on a bed of straw; but so abundant were the consolations which he experienced, that he could not sleep. When St. Philip Neri left all things, he used, after going to rest, to receive so much consolation from God, that he would say: O my Jesus, allow me to sleep. Father Charles of Lorraine, who was descended from the princes of Lorraine, and entered the Society of Jesus,

[1] "Inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te."—*Conf.* l. 1. c. 1.

[2] "Dura sunt omnia, et tu solus requies."—*Conf.* l. 6. c. 16.

[3] "Cur per multa vagaris, homuncio, quærendo bona? Ama unum bonum, in quo sunt omnia bona"—*Manual.* c. 34.

[4] "Fuerunt mihi lacrymæ meæ panes die ac nocte, dum dicitur mihi quotidie: Ubi est Deus tuus?"—*Ps.* xli. 4.

began sometimes to dance through joy in his poor cell. In the plains of India, St. Francis Xavier would uncover his breast and exclaim: "Enough, O Lord." No more consolation: my heart can bear no more. St. Teresa used to say that a single drop of heavenly consolation gives more content than all the pleasures and amusements of the world can give. Ah! God cannot but fulfil his promises to give peace and happiness to all who renounce worldly goods for his sake. *And every one that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall possess life everlasting.*[1]

What then do we seek after? Let us go to Jesus Christ, who calls us, saying: *Come to Me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you.*[2] Ah! the soul that loves God enjoys that peace which surpasses all the pleasures and gratifications which the world and the senses can give. It is true that in this life, even the saints have to submit to pains and crosses: for this earth is a place of merit, and it is impossible to merit without suffering. But, according to St. Bonaventure, divine love, like honey, renders things the most bitter, sweet and amiable. He that loves God, loves the will of God, and therefore he rejoices in sorrows, because in embracing them he knows that he gives delight and pleasure to his God. "We see the cross," says St. Bernard, "but not the unction."[3] We behold only the mortifications which the lovers of God endure, and the pleasures from which they abstain; but we do not see the spiritual delights with which the Lord consoles them. Oh! if sinners tasted the peace enjoyed by a soul that wishes for nothing but God!

[1] "Qui reliquerit domum, vel fratres . . . propter nomen meum centuplum accipiet, et vitam æternam possidebit."—*Matt.* xix. 29.

[2] "Venite ad me omnes, qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos."—*Matt.* xi. 28.

[3] "Crucem videntes, sed non etiam unctionem."—*In Dedic. Eccl.* s. 1.

O, taste and see, says David, *that the Lord is sweet.*[1] My brother, begin to make meditation every day, to communicate frequently, to converse with God; and you will find that during the short time which you spend with him, he will give you greater consolation than the world, with all its amusements, has ever given you. *O, taste and see!* He who has not tasted, cannot understand how God contents the soul that loves him.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer! how have I been hitherto so blind as to abandon Thee, who art an infinite good, and the fountain of all consolation, for the miserable and momentary gratification of the senses? I am astonished at my blindness, but I am still more astonished at Thy mercy, which has so bountifully borne with me. I thank Thee for making me now sensible of my folly, and of my obligation to love Thee. I love Thee, O my Jesus! with my whole soul, but I desire to love Thee with greater fervor. Increase my desire and my love. Enamor my soul of Thee, who art infinitely amiable—of Thee, who hast left nothing undone to gain my love; of Thee, who so ardently desirest my love. *If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.*[2] Ah, my dear Redeemer, purify my heart from all impure affections, which hinder me to love Thee as I would wish! It is not in my power to inflame my whole heart with the love of Thee, and to make it love nothing but Thee. This requires the power of Thy grace, which can do all things. Detach me from every creature, banish from my soul every affection that is not for Thee, make me all Thine. I am sorry above all things for all the displeasure I have given Thee. I resolve to consecrate all the days of my life to Thy holy love; but it is only Thy grace that can make me fulfil this resolution. Grant me, O Lord, this grace for the sake of the blood which Thou didst shed for me with so much pain, and so much love. Let it be the glory of Thy power to make my heart, which was once full of earthly affections, now become all flames of love for Thee, O infinite Good! O mother of fair love, O Mary! by thy prayers make my whole soul burn, as thine did, with the charity of God.

[1] "Gustate, et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus."—*Ps.* xxxiii. 9

[2] "Si vis, potes me mundare."—*Matt.* viii 2

CONSIDERATION XXII.

The Habit of Sin.

'The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth."—*Prov.* xviii. 3.

FIRST POINT.

The Habit of Sin Blinds the Soul.

THE evil inclination to sin is one of the greatest injuries that we have received from the sin of Adam. This made the Apostle weep when he saw himself impelled by concupiscence to the very evil which he abhorred. *I see another law in my members . . . captivating me in the law of sin.*[1] Hence it is so difficult for us, who are drawn to evil by this concupiscence and by so many enemies, to reach, without sin, the land of bliss. What would you say of a traveller who, being obliged to cross an agitated sea in a shattered vessel, would load the ship with a burden which, even in a calm sea, would be sufficient to sink the vessel? What hopes could you entertain of the safety of such a man? Now, we may say the same of the man who has contracted an evil habit: he must pass the sea of this life (a sea always tempestuous, in which so many perish) in the weak and shattered vessel of the flesh, to which we are united: and he overloads this vessel with sins of habit. It is very difficult for such a man to save his soul; because a bad habit

[1] "Video aliam legem in membris meis . . . captivantem me in lege peccati."—*Rom.* vii. 23.

blinds the understanding, hardens the heart, and thus makes the sinner obstinate till death.

First, a bad habit *blinds* the understanding. Why do the saints always implore light from God, and tremble lest they should become the greatest sinners in the world? Because they know that if they lose God's light they may commit the greatest crimes. How does it happen that so many Christians live obstinately in sin until they are lost in the end? *Their own malice blinded them.*[1] Sin blinds them, and thus they are lost. Every sin produces blindness; the more sins are multiplied, the greater the blindness they produce. God is our light; and therefore, the farther the soul is removed from God, the more blind it becomes. *His bones*, says Job, *shall be filled with the vices of his youth.*[2] As the light of the sun cannot enter a vessel filled with clay: so a heart replete with vices cannot admit the light of God. Hence we see certain sinners lose the divine light, so that they go on from sin to sin without ever thinking of repentance. *The wicked walk round about.*[3] Fallen into the dark pit of sin, they do nothing but commit sins, they speak only of sins, they think only of sinning, and scarcely feel any longer that sin is an evil. The very habit of sin, says St. Augustine, does not allow them to see the evil which they do.[4] Hence they live as if they no longer believed in the existence of God, of heaven, hell, or eternity.

And behold! after an evil habit is contracted, the sins which before excited horror are now viewed with indifference. *Make them*, says David, *like a wheel, and as stubble*

[1] "Excæcavit illos malitia eorum."—*Wis.* ii. 21.

[2] "Ossa ejus implebuntur vitiis."—*Job*, xx. 11.

[3] "In circuitu impii ambulant."—*Ps.* xi. 9.

[4] "Ita ut ipsa consuetudo mali non eos sinat videre quia malum est."—*Serm.* 98, E. B.

before the wind.[1] See, says Gregory, how a straw is blown about by every breath of air. In like manner a person, before he falls into sin, resists and combats temptations, at least for some time; but, after having contracted a bad habit, he yields instantly to every temptation, and falls in every occasion of sin: and why? Because the habit of sin has deprived him of light. St. Anselm says that the devil acts toward certain sinners like a person who fastens a cord to a bird: he allows it to fly away; but, whenever he pleases, draws it back to the earth. These are, according to the saint, habitual sinners. St. Bernardine says (tom. iv. serm. xv.) that some continue to commit sin without being exposed to any dangerous occasion. He compares habitual sinners to the wings of a windmill, which *are driven round by every wind*, and turn the mill even when there is no corn to be ground, and against the will of the master. You will find habitual sinners who indulge in bad thoughts even without any occasion to excite them, without pleasure, and drawn into them as it were involuntarily and forcibly by the effects of evil habits. As St. Augustine says a bad habit brings on a certain necessity.[2] And according to St. Bernardine, evil habits are changed into our nature.[3] Hence, as it is necessary for a man to breathe, so it appears that habitual sinners become the slaves of sin, and bring themselves into a necessity of falling into sin. I have said that they become *slaves* of sin. There are servants, who serve for wages, and slaves, who serve by force and without remuneration. With these we may compare certain miserable men, who sin even without pleasure.

[1] "Pone illos ut rotam, et sicut stipulam ante faciem venti."—*Ps.* lxxxii. 14.

[2] "Dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas."—*Conf.* 8, c. 5.

[3] "Usus vertitur in naturam."—T. iii. s. 15.

The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins contemneth.[1] This passage St. Chrysostom explains of habitual sinners, who, sunk in an abyss of darkness, despise corrections, sermons, censures, hell, and God: they despise everything, and resemble the vulture, that waits to be killed by the fowler, rather than abandon the dead body on which it feeds. Father Recupito relates that a man condemned to death, even when going to the place of execution, raised his eyes, saw a young female, and consented to a bad thought. Father Gisolfo relates that a blasphemer, who had been likewise condemned to death, when thrown off the scaffold, broke out into a blasphemy. St. Bernard goes so far as to say that it is almost useless to pray for habitual sinners,—that we must weep over them as lost forever. If they no longer see their danger, how can they escape the precipice? To preserve them from it, a miracle of grace is necessary. The miserable wretches will open their eyes in hell, when the sight of their misery will serve only to make them weep more bitterly over their folly.

Affections and Prayers.

My God! Thou hast bestowed more favors on me than on others, and I have done greater injuries to Thee than any person whom I know. O sorrowful heart of my Redeemer, so much afflicted and tortured on the cross at the sight of my sins; give me through Thy merits a lively sense of my faults, and a lively sorrow for them. Ah, my Jesus! I am full of vices, but Thou art omnipotent: Thou canst easily fill my soul with Thy holy love. I therefore hope in Thee, who art infinite Goodness and infinite mercy. I repent, O Sovereign Good! of having offended Thee. O that I had died rather than have ever offended Thee! I have forgotten Thee; but Thou hast not forgotten me; this I see with the light which Thou now givest me. Since, then, Thou givest me this light, give me also strength to be faithful

[1] "Impius, cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit."—*Prov.* xviii. 3.

to Thee. I promise to die a thousand times rather than ever turn my back upon Thee. But in Thy aid I place my hopes. *In Thee! O Lord, I have hoped; let me never be confounded.* I hope, O my Jesus! in Thee, that I shall never more see myself confounded in sin, and deprived of Thy grace. To thee also, O Mary, my mistress! I turn. In thee, O Lady! I have hoped; let me not be confounded forever. O my hope, I trust in thy intercession, that I shall never again see myself the enemy of thy Son. Ah! beg of him to strike me dead rather than abandon me to this sovereign misfortune.

SECOND POINT.

The Habit of Sin Hardens the Heart.

A bad habit *hardens* the heart. And this hardness of heart God justly permits in punishment of resisting his calls. *The Lord*, says the Apostle, *hath mercy on whom He will: and whom He will He hardeneth.*[1] According to St. Augustine, God hardens the sinner by not showing mercy.[2] It is not that God directly hardens habitual sinners, but he subtracts his graces in punishment of their ingratitude for past favors, and thus their heart becomes hard like a stone. *His heart shall be as hard as a stone, and as firm as a smith's anvil.*[3] Hence, it is that, while others are softened, and shed tears in hearing sermons on the rigor of divine justice, on the pains of the damned, or on the Passion of Jesus Christ, the habitual sinner remains unmoved, he speaks and listens to others speaking on these subjects with as much indifference as if they did not concern him; and thus these sermons will serve to render him more obdurate. *His heart shall be as firm as a smith's anvil.*

Even sudden deaths, earthquakes, thunder and lightning will no longer strike terror into the heart of the

[1] "Cujus vult miseretur, et quem vult indurat."—*Rom.* ix. 18.

[2] "Obduratio Dei est nolle misereri."—*De Div. Quæst. ad Simpl.* n. 15.

[3] "Cor ejus indurabitur tamquam lapis, et stringetur quasi malleatoris incus."—*Job*, xli. 15.

habitual sinner: instead of awaking, and making him enter into himself, they will rather encourage him in the deadly sleep of death and perdition in which he slumbers: *At Thy rebuke, O God of Jacob, they have all slumbered.*[1] An evil habit gradually takes away all remorse of conscience: to the habitual sinner crimes the most enormous appear trifling. The commission of sin is naturally accompanied with shame; but, according to St. Jerome, they who contract evil habits lose even the shame of committing sin.[2] St. Peter compares the habitual sinner to the swine that wallows in the mire.[3] As the swine wallowing in the mire feels not its stench, so the habitual sinner perceives not the stench of his crimes, which disgusts all others. "And," says St. Bernardine, "what wonder is it that, after the mire of sin has blinded him, he should not see his miserable condition, even when God scourges him for his iniquities?"[4] Hence, it happens that, instead of regretting his sins, he rejoices at them, he laughs at them, and boasts of them. *They are glad when they have done evil.*[5] *A fool worketh mischief as it were for sport.*[6] Are not these clear signs of diabolical obduracy? They are, says St. Thomas of Villanova, all signs of damnation.[7] My brother, tremble lest this may happen to you. If you have contracted any evil habit, endeavor to abandon it now that God calls you. Rejoice and be glad as long as conscience reproves you; for it is a sign that God has not as yet abandoned you; but amend, and instantly

[1] "Ab increpatione tua, Deus Jacob, dormitaverunt."—*Ps.* lxxv. 7.

[2] Qui ne pudorem quidem habent in delictis.

[3] "Sus lota in volutabro luti."—2 *Peter*, ii. 22.

[4] "Cum populus immergit se in peccatis, sicut sus in volutabro luti, quid mirum, si Dei flagellantis futura judicia non cognoscit?"—T. II., p. 20, a. 2, c. 4.

[5] "Lætantur, cum malefecerint."—*Prov* ii. 14.

[6] "Quasi per risum stultus operatur scelus."—*Ib.* x. 23.

[7] "Induratio, damnationis indicium."—*Fer.* 6 *p. Dom.* 1 *Quadr.*

shake off the bad habit; if you do not, the wound will become gangrenous, and you will be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

O Lord, how shall I be able to thank Thee as I ought for so many graces which Thou hast bestowed upon me! How often hast Thou called, and I have resisted! Instead of being grateful to Thee, and loving Thee, for having delivered me from hell, and for having called me with so much love, I have continued to provoke Thy wrath, by offering repeated insults to Thee. O my God! I will no longer outrage Thy patience: I have offended Thee enough. Thou alone, who art infinite Goodness, couldst have borne with me till the present moment. But I now see that Thou canst bear no longer with me. Pardon me then, O my Lord and my Sovereign Good! pardon me all the injuries I have offered to Thee. I am sorry for them with my whole heart, and purpose never more to offend Thee. Shall I forever continue to provoke Thee? Ah, be appeased with me, O God of my soul! not through my merits, for which nothing else is reserved but vengeance and hell, but through the merits of Thy Son and my Redeemer, in which I place all my hopes. For the love of Jesus Christ, receive me into favor, and give me perseverance in Thy love. Banish from me all impure affections, and draw me entirely to Thyself. I love Thee, O supreme God! I love Thee, O sovereign lover of souls! who art worthy of infinite love. Oh! that I had always loved Thee. O Mary, my Mother! obtain for me the grace to spend the remainder of my life not in offending, but in loving thy Son, and in bewailing the displeasure I have given him.

THIRD POINT.

The Habit of Sin Leads to Final Impenitence.

When the understanding is deprived of light, and the heart hardened, the sinner ordinarily makes a bad end, and dies obstinate in his sin. *A hard heart shall fare ill at the end.*[1] The just continue to walk in the straight path. *The path of the just is right to walk in.*[2] But habitual sin-

[1] "Cor durum habebit male in novissimo."—*Ecclus.* iii. 27.

[2] "Rectus callis justi ad ambulandum."—*Isa.* xxvi. 7.

ners always *walk round about.*[1] They give up sin for a little, and afterward return to it. Their damnation St. Bernard regards as certain. "Woe to the man who follows this circle."[2] Some of them say: I will amend before death; but it is very difficult for an habitual sinner, even in his old age, to change his life. *A young man,* says the Holy Ghost, *according to his way, even when he is old, he will not depart from it.*[3] We are very weak. *Your strength,* says the Prophet Isaias, *shall be as the ashes of tow.*[4] Hence, as St. Thomas of Villanova says, the soul deprived of grace cannot abstain from committing new sins.[5] But would it not be the extreme of folly to play for, and voluntarily to lose, all your property, with the hope of winning it back in the last game? Such is the folly of the man who continues to live in the midst of sins, and hopes at the last moment of life to repair all the evil he has done. Can the Ethiopian or the leopard change the color of his skin? And how can he who has long indulged in the habit of sin, lead a good life? *If,* says the Prophet Jeremias, *the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well when you have learned evil.*[6] Hence the habitual sinner, in the end, abandons himself to despair. Such is the manner in which his life terminates. *But he that is hardened in mind shall fall into evil.*[7]

On the words of Job, *He hath torn me with wound upon*

[1] "In circuitu impii ambulant."—*Ps.* xi. 9.

[2] "Væ homini qui sequitur hunc circuitum."—*In Pt.* xc. s. 12.

[3] "Adolescens juxta viam suam, etiam cum senuerit, non recedet ab ea."—*Prov.* xxii. 6.

[4] "Et erit fortitudo vestra, ut favilla stupæ."—*Isa.* i. 31.

[5] "Quo fit, ut anima, a gratia destituta, diu evadere ulteriora peccata non possit."—*Dom.* 4 *Quadr.*

[6] "Si mutare potest Æthiops pellem suam, aut pardus varietates suas; et vos poteritis benefacere, cum didiceritis malum."—*Jer.* xiii. 23.

[7] "Qui vero mentis est duræ, corruet in malum."—*Prov.* xxviii. 14.

wound, he hath rushed in upon me like a giant,[1] St. Gregory says that a person may, perhaps, be able to defend himself after the first wound; but after every additional one, he loses strength, till in the end he loses his life. So it is with sin. After the first and second transgressions, the sinner will have some strength (that is, through the aid of God's grace); but, if he continue in the habit of sin, it will rush on him like a giant. How is it possible for the sinner to escape death after his strength has been diminished, and his wounds multiplied? Sin, as the Prophet Jeremias says, like a huge stone, oppresses the sinner.[2] St. Bernard compares the habitual sinner with a man who has fallen under a large stone, which he has not strength to remove. It is as difficult for the former to shake off his bad habits, as it is for the latter to get rid of the load that presses upon him. "The man on whom the weight of a bad habit presses, rises with difficulty."[3]

The habitual sinner may say: Is my salvation then hopeless? No, you are not beyond hope: if you wish to apply it, there is still a remedy for the past. But a certain author says, that in grievous maladies very severe remedies are necessary. If to a sick man in danger of death, and unwilling to take medicine, because he is not aware of the malignity of his disease, the physician said: Friend, you will certainly die unless you take such a medicine: what would be the answer of the invalid? He would say, "As my life is in danger, I am ready to obey all your directions." Dearly beloved Christian, if you are an habitual sinner, I say the same to you. You are very ill; you are one of those invalids who, as St.

[1] "Concidit me vulnere super vulnus, irruit in me quasi gigas."—*Job*, xvi. 15.

[2] "Et posuerunt lapidem super me."—*Lament.* iii. 53.

[3] "Difficile surgit, quem moles malæ consuetudinis premit."—*In Joan. tr.* 49.

Thomas of Villanova says, *are seldom cured;*[1] you are on the brink of perdition. But if you wish to recover from your illness, there is a remedy for you; however, you must not expect a miracle of grace. You must on your part labor hard to take away the occasions of sin, to avoid bad company, to resist temptations by recommending yourself to God as soon as you perceive them: you must adopt the means of salvation, by going frequently to confession, by reading a spiritual book every day, by practising devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and continually imploring her to obtain for you strength not to relapse into sin. You must do violence to yourself: otherwise the threat of the Lord against obstinate sinners will fall upon you. *You shall die in your sin.* And if you do not adopt these means now that the Lord gives you light, you will scarcely adopt them hereafter. Listen to God calling you to repentance. *Lazarus, come forth.* Poor sinner! you are long dead: go forth from the dark grave of your sinful life. Respond at once to the call, and give yourself instantly to God. Tremble lest this should be the last call for you.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! what do I wait for? Shall I wait till Thou dost abandon me and send me to hell? Ah, Lord! bear with me; I wish to change my life, and to give myself to Thee. Tell me what I must do, and I will do it. O blood of Jesus! assist me. O Mary, advocate of sinners, come to my relief. O eternal Father! have mercy on me through the merits of Jesus and Mary. I am sorry, O God of infinite Goodness! for having offended Thee, and I love Thee above all things. Pardon me for the sake of Jesus Christ, and give me Thy love. Give me also a great fear of being lost, should I again offend Thee. Light, O my God! light and strength. I hope for everything from Thy mercy.

[1] "Raro sanantur."—*Fer.* 6 *p. Dom.* 1 *Quadr.*

Thou didst bestow so many graces on me when I wandered at a distance from Thee; I hope for far greater graces, now that I return to Thee, resolved to love nothing but Thee. I love Thee, my God, my life, my all. I love thee also, O my Mother, Mary! to thee I consign my soul; preserve it by thy intercession from ever returning to a state of enmity with God.

CONSIDERATION XXIII.

The Delusions which the Devil Puts into the Minds of Sinners.

(Although the preceding considerations contain many of the sentiments contained in this, it will be useful to collect them all together, in order to dissipate the usual illusions by which the devil succeeds in inducing sinners to relapse.)

FIRST POINT.

I will Go to Confession.—I cannot Resist.

Let us imagine a young man who has fallen into grievous sins, which he has already confessed, and who is restored to the friendship of God. The devil again tempts him to relapse: the young man resists for a while; but, in consequence of the delusions suggested by the enemy, he begins to vacillate. Tell me, young man, I say to him, What will you do? Will you now, for this miserable pleasure, forfeit the grace of God, which you have just acquired, and which is more valuable than the whole world? Will you, yourself, write the sentence of eternal death, and condemn yourself to burn forever in hell? No, you answer, *I do not wish to damn myself, I wish to be saved: If I commit this sin, I will afterward confess it.* Behold the first delusion of the devil! Then you say that you will afterward confess it; but in the mean time you lose your soul. Tell me, if you had a jewel worth a thousand crowns, would you throw it into a river, saying, I will make a diligent search for it, and hope to find it?

You hold in your hand the precious jewel of your soul, which Jesus Christ has purchased with his blood, and you voluntarily cast it into hell (for in punishment of every mortal sin, you are condemned to eternal fire), and say: I hope to recover it by a good confession. But should you not recover it, what will be the consequence? To recover the divine grace, true repentance, which is the gift of God, is necessary. Should God not give you the grace of repentance; should death overtake you, and not allow you time to go to confession, what will become of you?

You say that you will go to confession before the lapse of a week. And who promises you that you will live for a week? You then say that you will go to confession to-morrow. And who promises you to-morrow? St. Augustine says: "God has not promised to-morrow: perhaps he will give it, and perhaps he will not." Perhaps he will deny it to you, as he has denied it to so many others who have gone to bed in good health, and have been found dead in the morning. How many have been struck dead in the act of sin, and sent to hell? And should the same happen to you, how will you be able to repair your eternal ruin? Be assured that by this delusion—*I will afterward go to confession*—the devil has brought thousands and thousands of Christians to hell. It is difficult to find a sinner so abandoned to despair as to wish for his own damnation. In committing sin, all sinners hope to repent and go to confession; it is thus that so many miserable souls are lost: and now there is no remedy for their damnation.

But you say: *At present I cannot resist this temptation.* Behold the second delusion of the devil, who makes it appear to you that at present you have not strength to resist your passions. First, it is necessary to know that, as the Apostle says, *God is faithful, and never permits us to*

be tempted above our strength.[1] Moreover, I ask, if you are unable to resist your passions, how will you be able to resist them hereafter? After you have yielded to one temptation, the devil will tempt you to other sins, and by your consent to sin he will have gained an increase of strength against you, and you will have become weaker. If, then, you are now unable to extinguish the flame of passion, how can you expect to extinguish it when it has grown stronger? You say: God will give me his aid. But this aid he gives you at present. Why, then, do you not correspond with his grace and conquer your passion? Perhaps you expect that God will give you more abundant helps and graces after you have multiplied sins. If at present you wish for greater help and strength, why do you not ask them from God? *Ask, and it shall be given you.*[2] God cannot violate his promise. Have recourse to him, and he will give you the strength which you require in order to resist every temptation. God does not command impossibilities; but by his commands he admonishes us to do what we can with the actual aid which he gives us; and when this aid is not sufficient to enable us to resist temptations, he exhorts us to ask additional help, which he gives whenever we pray for it.

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my God! why hast Thou been so bountiful to me, and I so ungrateful to Thee? We have been engaged in a mutual contest. I fled away from Thee, and Thou didst seek after me. Thou didst confer benefits on me, and I offered insults to Thee. Ah, Lord! the goodness alone which Thou hast shown me ought to enamor me of Thee; for, when I multiplied sins, Thou didst multiply Thy graces. And when have I merited the light which Thou now givest me? My Lord! I thank Thee for it

[1] "Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis."—1 *Cor.* x. 13.

[2] "Petite, et accipietis."—*John*, xvi. 24.

with my whole heart, and I hope to thank Thee for it eternally in heaven. I hope in Thy blood for eternal salvation, and I hope for it with certainty, since Thou hast treated me with so much mercy. I hope that Thou wilt give me grace never more to betray Thee. I purpose, with Thy grace, to die a thousand times rather than ever again offend Thee. I have offended Thee sufficiently. During the remainder of my life I wish to love Thee. And how can I but love a God who, after having died for me, has waited for me with so much patience, in spite of the numberless injuries I have done him. O God of my soul! I repent of all my sins with my whole heart; I would wish to die of sorrow for them. But if I have hitherto turned my back upon Thee, I now love Thee above all things; I love Thee more than myself. Eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ, assist a miserable sinner, who wishes to love Thee. Mary, my hope! assist me; obtain for me the grace always to have recourse to thy Son and to thee, as often as the devil tempts me to offend God again.

SECOND POINT.

God is Merciful.

God is merciful. Behold the third delusion of sinners by which an immense number are lost! A learned author says, that the mercy of God sends more souls to hell than his justice; for sinners are induced, by a rash confidence in the divine mercy, to continue in sin, and thus are lost. God is merciful. Who denies it? But great as is his mercy, how many does he send to hell every day? God is merciful: but he is also just; and therefore he is obliged to punish those who offend him. He shows mercy; but to whom? To them who fear him. *He hath strengthened His mercy toward them that fear Him. As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him.*[1] But he executes justice on those who despise him, and abuse his mercy to insult

[1] "Corroboravit misericordiam suam super timentes se. . . . Misertus est Dominus timentibus se."—*Ps.* cii. 11, 13.

him the more. God pardons sin; but he cannot pardon the will or the determination to sin. St. Augustine says, that he who sins with the intention of afterward repenting, is not a penitent, but a mocker of God's majesty. But the Apostle tells us that God does not allow himself to be mocked. *Be not deceived. God is not mocked.*[1] It would be a mockery of God to insult him as often and as much as you please, and afterward to expect heaven.

But as God has shown me so many mercies hitherto, so I hope he will treat me with mercy hereafter. Behold the fourth delusion! Then, must the Lord, because he has had compassion on you, show mercy forever, and never chastise you? No: the greater have been his mercies to you, the more you have reason to fear that, if you offend him again, he will pardon you no more, but will take vengeance on your sins. *Say not: I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder.*[2] Say not: I have sinned, and have not been punished; for though God endures, he will not do so forever. When the number of mercies which he has resolved to show to the sinner is exhausted, he then punishes all his sins together. And the longer God has waited for his repentance, the more severe will be his punishment, says St. Gregory.[3]

If then, O my brother, you see that you have often offended God, and that he has not sent you to hell, you should say: *The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed.*[4] Lord! I thank Thee, for not having sent me to hell, as I deserved. Consider how many have been damned for fewer sins than you have committed, and labor to atone, by penance and other good works, for

[1] "Nolite errare, Deus non irridetur."—*Gal.* vi. 7.

[2] "Ne dixeris: Peccavi, et quid mihi accidit triste? Altissimus enim est patiens redditor."—*Ecclus.* v. 4.

[3] "Quos diu tolerat, durius damnat."—*In Evang. hom.* 13.

[4] "Misericordiæ Domini, quia non sumus consumpti."—*Lam.* iii. 22

the offences you have offered to God. The patience which he has had with you, and the great mercies which he has shown to you, and not to others, ought to animate you not to offend him again, but to serve and love him.

Affections and Prayers.

My crucified Jesus, my Redeemer and my God! behold a traitor at Thy feet. I am ashamed to appear before Thee. How often have I mocked Thee! How often have I promised to offend Thee no more! But my promises have been so many treasons; for when the occasion of sin was presented to me I have forgotten Thee, and have again turned my back upon Thee, I thank Thee that I am not now in hell, but at Thy feet, where Thou enlightenest me, and callest me to Thy love. Yes; I wish to love Thee, my Saviour and my God! and I wish never more to despise Thee. Thou hast borne with me long enough. I see that Thou canst bear with me no longer. Unhappy me, if after so many graces, I offend Thee again! Lord, I sincerely wish and resolve to change my life: I wish to love Thee as much as I have offended Thee. It consoles me to have to deal with Thee, who art infinite goodness: but I am sorry above all things for having so much despised Thee, and I promise Thee all my love for the future. Pardon me through the merits of Thy Passion; forget the injuries I have done Thee, and give me strength to be faithful to Thee during the remainder of my life. I love Thee, O my Sovereign Good! and I hope to love Thee forever. My dear God! I will never more abandon Thee. O Mary, Mother of God! bind me to Jesus Christ, and obtain for me the grace never again to depart from his feet. In Thee I trust.

THIRD POINT.

I am Young—Perhaps.

But I am young. God compassionates youth. I will hereafter give myself to God. We are now at the fifth delusion. But do you not know that God counts, not the years, but the sins of each individual? You are young! But how many sins have you committed? There are many

persons of very advanced age who have not been guilty of the tenth part of the sins which you have committed. And do you not know that God has fixed the number and measure of sins which he will pardon each? *The Lord waiteth patiently*, says Holy Scripture, *that when the day of judgment shall come, He may punish them in the fulness of their sins.*[1] That is, God has patience, and waits for a certain time; but when the measure of the sins which he has resolved to pardon is filled up, he pardons no more, but chastises the sinner by sending him a sudden death while in the state of damnation, or he abandons him in his sin—a chastisement worse than death. *I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be wasted.*[2] If you had encompassed a field with a hedge, and cultivated it many years, and found that after all your labor and expense it produced no fruit, what would you do with it? Would you not take away the hedge and abandon it? Tremble, lest God should treat you in a similar manner. If you continue to offend him, you will gradually lose remorse of conscience—you will cease to think of eternity, or of the salvation of your soul—you will lose all light and fear: behold the hedge taken away: behold your soul already abandoned by God.

Let us come to the last delusion. You say: *It is true that if I commit this sin, I shall lose the grace of God, and shall be condemned to hell; it may be that in punishment of it I shall be damned; but it may also happen that I shall afterward make a good confession, and save my soul.* Yes, it may, I admit, happen that you will be saved; for I am not a prophet, and therefore I cannot say for certain, that, if you commit this sin, God will show you no more mercy. But you cannot deny that, if, after the great graces God has bestowed upon you, you offend him again, you

[1] "Dominus patienter expectat, ut eas (nationes), cum judicii dies advenerit in plenitudine peccatorum puniat."—2 *Mach.* vi. 14.

[2] "Auferam sepem ejus, et erit in direptionem."—*Isa.* v. 5.

will expose yourself to very great danger of being lost forever. Attend to the language of Scripture. *A hard heart shall fare evil at the last.*[1] *Evil-doers shall be cut off.*[2] The wicked will in the end be cut off by divine justice. *What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap.*[3] He that sows sins, will reap nothing but pains and torments. *I called and you refused. . . . I will laugh in your destruction, and will mock when that shall come to you which you feared.*[4] I have called you, says the Lord, and you have mocked me; but I will mock you at the hour of death. *Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time.*[5] To me belongs the punishment due to sins: I will inflict it when the time of vengeance arrives. Such are the threats of the Scriptures against obstinate sinners; such is the chastisement which reason and justice demand. You say: *It may happen, after all, that I shall be saved.* I again admit that this may happen; but is it not the height of folly to trust the eternal salvation of your soul to a *perhaps?*—to a possibility of escaping hell when your salvation is so very improbable? Is eternal life an affair to be exposed to such imminent danger.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer! prostrate at Thy feet, I thank Thee for not having abandoned me after I had committed so many sins. How many who have offended Thee less than I have will never receive the light which Thou now givest me! I see that Thou earnestly desirest my salvation, and I wish to be saved, principally for the sake of pleasing Thee. I wish for heaven that there I may eternally sing the mercies which Thou hast shown me. I hope that Thou hast already pardoned me. But should

[1] "Cor durum habebit male in novissimo."—*Ecclus.* iii. 27.

[2] "Qui malignantur, exterminabuntur."—*Ps.* xxxvi. 9.

[3] "Quæ seminaverit homo, hæc et metet."—*Gal.* vi. 8.

[4] "Vocavi, et renuistis; . . . ego quoque, in interitu vestro, ridebo et subsannabo."—*Prov.* i. 24.

[5] "Mea est ultio, et ego retribuam in tempore."—*Deut.* xxxii. 35.

I still be Thy enemy in consequence of not repenting as I ought of the offences I have offered to Thee, I am now sorry for them with my whole soul; they displease me above all things. Pardon me for Thy mercy's sake, and increase continually my sorrow for having offended Thee, who art so good a God. Give me sorrow,—give me love. I love Thee above all things, but I love Thee too little. I wish to love Thee ardently. This love I ask and hope for from Thee. Hear me, O my Jesus! Thou hast promised to hear all who pray to Thee. O Mary, Mother of God! all tell me that thou never allowest a soul that recommends itself to thee to go away disconsolate. I trust in thee; recommend me to thy Son, and obtain for me eternal life.

CONSIDERATION XXIV.

The Particular Judgment.

"We must all be manifested before the judgment-seat of Christ."—2 *Cor.* v. 10.

FIRST POINT.

The Guilty Soul before its Judge.

CONSIDER the appearance, the accusation, the examination, and the sentence. With regard to the appearance of the soul before its Judge, it is the common opinion of theologians, that the particular judgment takes place at the very moment of death; and that on the very spot where the soul is separated from the body, it is judged by Jesus Christ, who will not send, but will come himself to judge it according to its works. *At what hour you think not the Son of man will come.*[1] "He will," says St. Augustine, "come in love to the good, in terror to the wicked."[2] Oh! how great will be the terror of the soul the first time it sees the Redeemer, and sees his countenance full of wrath! *Who*, says the prophet Nahum, *shall stand before the face of His indignation?*[3] This thought made Father Louis da Ponte tremble so as to shake the cell in which he lay. Hearing the *Dies Iræ* sung, and reflecting on the terror of the soul when it is presented before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, the venerable P. Juvenal Ancina

[1] "Qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet."—*Luke*, xii. 40.

[2] "Veniet vobis in amore, impiis in tremore."—*Serm.* 181. E. B. App.

[3] "Ante faciem indignationis ejus, quis stabit?"—*Nahum*, i. 6

took, and afterward executed, the resolution of forsaking the world. The sight of the wrath of the Judge will announce the sentence. *The wrath of the King is as messengers of death.*[1] St. Bernard says that the soul will suffer more in seeing the indignation of Jesus Christ, than in hell itself.[2] When presented before an earthly judge, criminals have been known to perspire with a cold perspiration. Such was the confusion which Piso felt at the thought of appearing as a criminal before the senate, that he killed himself. How great is the pain of a child, or of a vassal, in appearing before an angry parent or an enraged sovereign! Oh, how much greater will be the pain and confusion of the soul when it beholds Jesus Christ enraged against it for the insults which it offered to him during life! *They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.*[3] The soul will see in wrath the Lamb that bore with it so patiently during life, and that there is no hope of appeasing his anger. This shall make the soul call upon the mountains to fall upon it and to hide it from the fury of the wrathful Lamb.[4] Speaking of judgment, St. Luke says: *Then they shall see the Son of Man.*[5] Oh! what pain will the sight of the judge in the form of man excite in the soul of the sinner! The sight of a Man-God who died for his salvation will upbraid him with his ingratitude. When the Saviour ascended into heaven, the angels said to the disciples: *This Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come as you have seen Him going into heaven.*[6]

[1] "Indignatio regis, nuntii mortis."—*Prov.* xvi. 14.

[2] Mallet esse in inferno.

[3] "Videbunt in quem transfixerunt."—*John*, xix. 37.

[4] "(Montes), cadite super nos, et abscondite nos ab ira Agni."—*Apoc.* vi. 16.

[5] "Tunc videbunt Filium hominis."—*Luke*, xxi. 27.

[6] "Hic Jesus, qui assumptus est a vobis in cœlum, sic veniet, quem admodum vidistis eum euntem in cœlum."—*Acts*, i. 11.

With the same wounds with which he ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ will come to judge the soul. "Great joy of the beholders," says the Abbot Rupert, "great terror of those who are in expectation."[1] The wounds of the Redeemer will console the just and terrify the wicked. When Joseph said to his brothers, *I am Joseph, whom you sold*, the Scripture tells us that, through fear, they were silent and unable to utter a word.[2] *His brethren could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear.* Now what answer will the sinner make to Jesus Christ? Will he dare to ask mercy when he must first render an account of his abuse of the mercy which he has received? "With what face," says Eusebius Emissenus, "will you, who are to be first judged for contempt of mercy, ask for mercy?"[3] What, then, will become of him? Where, says St. Augustine, will he fly? He will behold an angry judge above; hell open below; on one side his own sins accusing him; on the other, the devils ready to inflict chastisement; and within, the remorse of his conscience. "Above shall be an enraged Judge; below, a frightful chaos; on the right, sins accusing him; on the left, the devils dragging him to punishment; within, a burning conscience: beset in this manner, whither will the sinner fly![4]

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus! I will always call Thee Jesus. Thy name consoles and encourages me, because it reminds me that Thou art

[1] "Grande gaudium intuentium, grandis timor expectantium."—*De Op. Sp. S.* l. 9, c. 8.

[2] "Ego sum Joseph, quem vendidistis. . . . Non poterant respondere fratres, nimio terrore perterriti."—*Gen.* xlv. 3.

[3] Qua fronte misericordiam petes, primum de misericordiæ contemptu judicandus?

[4] "Superius erit Judex iratus, inferius horrendum chaos, a dextris peccata accusantia, a sinistris dæmonia ad supplicium trahentia, intus conscientia urens; quo fugiet peccator sic comprehensus.—*Ap. S Bonav. Diæt. sal.* t. 9.

my Saviour, who didst die for my salvation. Behold me at Thy feet. I acknowledge that I have deserved hell as often as I have offended Thee by mortal sin. I am unworthy of pardon, but Thou hast died to merit pardon for me. Pardon me, then, immediately, O my Jesus! before Thou comest to judge me. I shall not then be able to ask pardon: I can now ask it from Thee, and I hope for it. Thy wounds will then fill me with terror, but now they give me confidence. My dear Redeemer! I am sorry above all things for having offended Thy infinite goodness. I purpose to submit to every pain, every loss, rather than forfeit Thy grace. I love Thee with my whole heart. Have pity on me. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy." O Mary, Mother of mercy! obtain for me a great sorrow for my sins, pardon, and perseverance in thy divine love. I love thee, O my queen, and trust in thee.

SECOND POINT.

Nothing will Remain Hidden.

CONSIDER the accusation and scrutiny: *The judgment sat and the books were opened.*[1] There will be two books, the Gospel and conscience. In the Gospel will be read what the accused should have done, and in his conscience what he has done. "Each individual," says St. Jerome, will see what he has done."[2] In the balance of divine justice, not riches nor dignities, nor nobility, but works only, will have weight. *Thou art weighed in the balance*, said Daniel to Balthasar, *and art found wanting.*[3] "Neither his gold," says Father Alvarez, "nor his wealth, but the king alone, is weighed."[4] The accusers will then come forward; and first of all the devil. "The devil," says St. Augustine, "will be at hand, and will recite the words of your profession. He will charge us before our

[1] "Judicium sedit et libri aperti sunt."—*Dan.* vii. 10.

[2] Videbit unusquisque quod fecit.

[3] "Appensus es in statera, et inventus es minus habens."—*Dan.* v. 27.

[4] Non aurum, non opes, in stateram veniunt; solus rex appensus est.

face with what we have done, he will state the day and the hour in which we have sinned."[1] *He will recite the words of your profession*—that is, he will bring forward the promises we have made and afterward violated: he will recount all our sins, pointing to the day and hour in which they were committed. According to St. Cyprian, he will then say to the Judge, "I have suffered neither stripes nor scourges for these men."[2] I have suffered nothing for this ungrateful sinner; and, to become my slave, he has forsaken you, who have died for his salvation: he therefore belongs to me. Their angel guardians will also, as Origen says, accuse sinners; each of them will say: I have labored so many years for the salvation of that man, but he has despised my admonitions. Thus "his very friends will then despise him."[3] The very walls within which he sinned shall bear witness against the sinner. *The stone shall cry out of the wall.*[4] His own conscience will accuse him. *Their conscience*, says St. Paul, *bearing witness to them . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men.*[5] Their very sins, says St. Bernard, will speak and say, "You have made us; we are your works; we shall not desert you."—*Lib. Med.* cap. ii. Finally, according to St. Chrysostom, the wounds of Jesus Christ will accuse the sinner: "the nails shall complain of thee, the wounds and the cross of Christ shall speak against thee." The examination will now begin.

[1] "Præsto erit diabolus ante tribunal Christi, et recitabuntur verba professionis nostræ: objiciet nobis in faciem quidquid fecimus, in qua die peccavimus, in quo loco."—*De Sal. Doc.* c. 62.

[2] "Ego pro istis, nec alapas accepi, nec flagella sustinui."—*De. Op. et Eleem.*

[3] "Omnes amici ejus spreverunt eam."—*Lam.* i. 2.

[4] "Lapis de pariete clamabit."—*Hab.* ii. 11.

[5] "Testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum . . . in die, cum judicabit Deus."—*Rom.* ii. 15.

I, says the Lord, *will search Jerusalem with lamps.*[1] The lamp, says Mendozza, penetrates every corner of the house. In explaining the words *with lamps*, Cornelius a Lapide says, that God shall then place before the sinner the examples of the saints, all the lights and inspirations bestowed upon him during his life, and all the years that had been given him that he might do good. *He hath called against me the time.*[2] The sinner shall have to render an account of every glance of the eye. According to the prophet Malachi, the Lord *shall purify the sons of Levi, and shall refine them as gold.*[3] As gold is refined by removing the dross, so our good works confessions and communions will be subjected to a severe examination. *When I shall take a time, I will judge justices.*[4] In fine, St. Peter tells that at judgment, the just will scarcely be saved. *If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*[5] If the sinner must answer for every idle word, what account will he have to give for consenting to so many bad thoughts, for uttering so many obscene words? Speaking of the authors of scandal, who have robbed him of so many souls, the Lord says: *I will meet them as a bear that is robbed of her whelps.*[6] With regard to works, the Judge will say: *Give her of the fruit of her hands.*[7] Reward him according to the works which he has performed.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! wert Thou now to reward me according to my works, hell would be my lot. O God! how often have I my-

[1] "In illo tempore, scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis."—*Soph.* i. 12.

[2] "Vocavit adversum me tempus."—*Lam.* i. 15.

[3] "Purgabit filios Levi, et colabit eos quasi aurum."—*Mal.* iii. 3.

[4] "Cum accepero tempus, ego justitias judicabo."—*Ps.* lxxiv. 3

[5] "Si justus vix salvabitur, impius et peccator ubi parebunt?"—*1 Peter*, iv. 18.

[6] "Occurram eis quasi ursa, raptis catulis."—*Os.* xiii. 8.

[7] "Date ei de fructu manuum suarum."—*Prov.* xxxi. 31.

self written the sentence of my condemnation to that place of torments! I thank Thee for the patience with which Thou hast borne me so long. O God! were I now obliged to appear before Thy judgment-seat, what account should I have to render of my past life! *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant.* Ah Lord! wait for me a little longer, do not judge me yet. Wert Thou now to judge me, what should become of me? Wait for me, since Thou hast treated me with so many mercies hitherto, grant me this new favor, infuse into my heart a great sorrow for my sins. I am sorry, O infinite Good! for having so often despised Thee. I love Thee above all things. Eternal Father! pardon me for the love of Jesus Christ; and through his merits, grant me holy perseverance. My Jesus! I hope for all things from Thy blood. Most holy Mary, in thee I trust. "Turn, then, O most gracious advocate, thy eyes of mercy toward us." Behold my miseries, and have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

The Sentence.

In fine, to obtain eternal life, the soul must be found, at judgment, to have led a life conformable to the life of Jesus Christ. *Whom he foreknew, he predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son.*[1] It was this that made Job tremble. *What shall I do when God shall rise to judge me? and when he shall examine, what shall I answer him?*[2] Philip II. rebuking a domestic for having told him a lie, said to him: *Is it thus you deceive me?* The domestic went home, and died of grief. What will the sinner do? what answer will he make to Jesus Christ, his Judge? He will, like the man in the Gospel, who came to the feast without the nuptial garment, remain silent, because he will not know what to answer. His very sins will close the sinner's mouth. *All iniquity shall stop her*

[1] "Quos præscivit, et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui."—*Rom.* viii. 29.

[2] "Quid faciam, cum surrexerit ad judicandum Deus? Et cum quæsierit, quid respondebo illi?"—*Job.* xxxi. 14.

mouth.[1] St. Basil says that the sinner will then suffer more from shame than from the very fire of hell.[2]

Finally, the Judge will pass sentence. *Depart from Me ye cursed into everlasting fire.*[3] Oh! what an awful thunder-clap will that sentence be to the sinner! "Oh! how frightfully," says Denis, the Carthusian, "will that thunder resound!"[4] "He," says St. Anselm, "that does not tremble at such thunder, sleeps not, but is dead."[5] Eusebius writes, that the terror of sinners at hearing the sentence of their condemnation, will be so great, that, if they could, they would die again.[6] "The wicked shall be seized with such dismay at the sight of the Judge pronouncing sentence, that, were they not immortal, they should die a second time." There is then no more time for prayer, no more intercessors whom the sinner can invoke. "There," says St. Thomas of Villanova, "there is no opportunity of praying; there no intercessor, no friend, no father, shall assist."[7] To whom will the sinner then have recourse? Is it to God, whom he has so much despised? "Who," says St. Basil, "shall deliver you? Is it that God whom you have insulted?"[8] Perhaps he may have recourse to the saints, or to Mary? No: for then *the stars*—that is, his holy advocates—*shall fall from heaven, and the moon*, which represents Mary,

[1] "Omnis iniquitas oppilabit os suum."—*Ps.* cvi. 42.

[2] "Horridior quam ignis erit pudor."—*Orat. de fut. jud.*

[3] "Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum."—*Matt.* xxv. 41.

[4] "Oh! quam horribiliter personabit tonitruum illud."—*De Quat. Nov.* a. 26.

[5] "Qui non tremit ad tantum tonitruum, non dormit, sed mortuus est."—*Medit.* 2.

[6] Tantus terror invadet malos, cum viderint Judicem sententiam proferentem, ut, nisi essent immortales, iterum morerentur.

[7] "Non ibi precandi locus; nullus intercessor assistet, non amicus, non pater."—*Dom.* 1 *Adv. conc.* 2.

[8] "Quis te eripiet? Deus ne ille quem contempsisti?"—*Oratio de Pœnit.*

shall not give her light.[1] "Mary," says St. Augustine, "will fly from the gate of heaven."[2]

"O God! with what indifference," exclaims St. Thomas of Villanova, "do we listen to persons speaking on judgment! We appear to feel as little as if the sentence of condemnation could not fall upon ourselves, or as if we were not to be judged.[3] And is it not," says the same saint, "great folly to entertain security in so perilous an affair."[4] My brother, St. Augustine admonishes you not to say: Will God really send me to hell?[5] Say it not, says the holy Doctor; for even the Jews did not persuade themselves that they should be exterminated. So many of the damned did not believe that they would be cast into hell, but afterward the final vengeance came upon them. *An end is come, the end is come. . . . Now I will accomplish My anger in thee, and will judge thee.*[6] And thus, as St. Augustine says, the same will also happen to you. "The day of judgment will come, and you shall find the threats of God verified."[7] At present it depends on us to choose whatever sentence we please. It is in our power, says St. Eligius, to determine the character of the sentence which we shall receive. What then must we do? We must adjust our accounts before judgment. *Before judgment prepare thee justice.*[8] St. Bonaventure says that, to

[1] "Luna non dabit lumen suum."—*Matt.* xxiv. 29.

[2] "Fugiet a janua paradisi Maria."—*Ad Fratres in er.* ser. 10.

[3] "Heu! quam securi hæc dicimus et audimus, quasi nos non tangeret hæc sententia, aut quasi dies ille nunquam esset venturus!"—*Dom.* 1 *Adv. conc.* 1.

[4] "Quænam est stulta securitas in discrimine tanto."—*De S. Mart.* conc. 1.

[5] Numquid Deus vere damnaturus est?

[6] "Finis venit, venit finis . . . nunc complebo furorem meum in te, et judicabo te."—*Ezek.* vii. 6.

[7] "Veniet judicii dies, et invenies verum quod minatus est Deus."—*In Ps.* lxxiii.

[8] "Ante judicium, para justitiam tibi."—*Ecclus.* xviii. 19.

escape the danger of failing in business, prudent merchants frequently review and settle their accounts. The Judge may be appeased before judgment, but not during judgment," says St. Augustine.[1] Let us then say with St. Bernard: "I desire to present myself before Thee already judged, and not to be judged."[2] O my Judge, I wish to be judged and punished during life, which is a time of mercy and pardon; for after death will be the time of justice.

Affections and Prayers.

My God! if I do not appease Thee now, there will then be no more time for turning away Thy anger. But how shall I, who have so often despised Thy friendship for miserable beastly pleasures, be able to appease Thy wrath? I have repaid with ingratitude Thy immense love. How can a creature ever make sufficient satisfaction for having offended the Creator? Ah, my Lord! I thank Thee, for giving me in Thy mercy a means of appeasing Thy anger and satisfying Thy justice. I offer Thee the blood and death of Jesus Christ, Thy Son, and behold! I see a superabundant atonement and satisfaction made to Thee. To appease Thy anger, my repentance is also necessary. Yes, my God! I repent with my whole heart of all the injuries I have done Thee. Judge me now, O my Redeemer! I detest above all things all the offences I have offered to Thee. I love Thee with my whole heart and above all things, and I purpose to love Thee always, and to die rather than ever offend Thee again. Thou hast promised to pardon all who repent. Ah! judge me now, and absolve me from my sins. I accept the punishment which I deserve, but reinstate me in Thy grace, and preserve me in it till death. Such is my hope. O Mary, my Mother! I thank thee for all the mercies which thou hast obtained for me. Ah! continue to protect me to the end.

[1] Judex, ante judicium placari potest, in judicio non potest.

[2] "Volo judicatus præsentari, non judicandus."—*In Cant.* s. 55.

CONSIDERATION XXV

The General Judgment.

"The Lord shall be known when He executeth judgments."—*Ps.* ix. 17.

FIRST POINT.

The General Resurrection.

At present there is no one in this world more despised than Jesus Christ. There is more respect shown to a peasant than to the Lord; for we are afraid to insult a peasant, or provoke him to anger, lest he should seek revenge. But insults are offered to God, and are repeated as wantonly as if he could not avenge them whenever he pleases. *The wicked*, says Job, *looked upon the Almighty as if He could do nothing.*[1] Therefore the Redeemer has appointed a day of general judgment, and which is called in the Scripture, *the day of the Lord;* on which Jesus Christ will make known the greatness of his majesty. *The Lord shall be known when He executeth judgments.*[2] Hence that day is called, not a day of mercy and pardon, but *a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery.*[3] Yes, for then the Lord will come to repair the honor which sinners have

[1] "Et quasi nihil posset facere Omnipotens, æstimabant eum."—*Job*, xxii. 17.

[2] "Cognoscetur Dominus judicia faciens."—*Ps.* ix. 17.

[3] "Dies iræ, dies tribulationis et angustiæ, dies calamitatis et miseriæ."—*Soph.* i. 15.

sought to take from him on this earth. Let us examine how the judgment of this great day will take place.

The coming of the Judge will be preceded by fire. '*A fire shall go before Him.*'[1] Fire will descend from heaven, and shall burn the earth and all things upon the earth. *The earth, and the works which are in it, shall be burnt up.*[2] Thus palaces, churches, villas, cities, kingdoms, all must be reduced to one heap of ashes. This house, defiled by sins, must be purified by fire. Behold the end of all the riches, pomps, and pleasures of this earth After the death of all men, the trumpet will sound, and all will rise again.[3] "As often," says Jerome, "as I consider the day of judgment, I tremble; that trumpet appears always to sound in my ears, *Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.*[4] At the sound of this trumpet, the souls of the just will descend to be united to the bodies with which they served God in this life; and the unhappy souls of the damned will come up from hell to take possession of the accursed bodies with which they offended God.

Oh! how great will be the difference between the bodies of the just and the bodies of the damned! The just will appear whiter, more beautiful, and more resplendent than the sun. *Then the just shall shine as the sun.*[5] Happy he who knows how to mortify his flesh in his life by refusing it forbidden pleasures; and who, to keep it under greater check, imitates the saints, by denying it even lawful gratifications, and by treating it with severity and contempt. Oh! how great will then be the happiness of those who will have practised mortification of the flesh! We may estimate it from the words which

[1] "Ignis ante ipsum præcedet."—*Ps.* xcvi. 3.

[2] "Terra et quæ in ipsa sunt opera exurentur."—2 *Peter*, iii. 10.

[3] "Canet enim tuba, et mortui resurgent."—1 *Cor.* xv. 52.

[4] Quoties diem judicii considero, contremisco: semper videtur illa tuba insonare auribus meis: Surgite mortui, venite ad judicium.

[5] "Tunc justi fulgebunt sicut sol."—*Matt.* xiii. 43.

St. Peter of Alcantara addressed after death to St. Teresa: "O happy penance, which merited for me so great glory." [1] But, on the other hand, the bodies of the reprobate will appear black and hideous, and will send forth an intolerable stench. Oh! how great the pain of the damned in taking possession of their bodies! Ac cursed body, the soul will say, to indulge you, I have brought myself to perdition. And the body will say: Accursed soul! why have you, who had the use of reason, allowed me the pleasures which have merited for you and me the eternal torments of hell?

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus and my Redeemer, who will be one day my judge, pardon me before that day arrives. *Turn not away Thy face from me.*[2] Thou art now a Father to me; and, like a father, receive into Thy friendship a son who casts himself with sorrow at Thy feet. My Father, I ask pardon. I have offended Thee; I have unjustly forsaken Thee. Thou didst not deserve such treatment from me. I repent of it; I am sorry for it with my whole heart. *Turn not away Thy face from me;* do not cast me off as I deserved. Remember the blood which Thou hast shed for me, and have pity on me. My Jesus, I wish for no other judge than Thee. "I willingly," said St. Thomas of Villanova, "submit to the judgment of him who died for me, and who, that he might not condemn me, has condemned himself to the cross." St. Paul has said the same. *Who is he that shall condemn? Christ Jesus, that died.*[3] My Father, I love Thee, and, for the future, I will never more depart from Thy feet. Forget the injuries I have done Thee, and give me a great love for Thy goodness. I desire to love Thee more than I have offended Thee; but if Thou dost not assist me, I shall not be able to love Thee. Assist me, O my Jesus! make me always

[1] "O felix pœnitentia, quæ tantam mihi promeruit gloriam."—*In ejus off. lect.* 6.

[2] "Non avertas faciem tuam a me."—*Ps.* xxvi. 9.

[3] "Quis est qui condemnet? Christus Jesus, qui mortuus est . . . pro nobis."—*Rom.* viii. 34.

grateful to Thy love, that on the day of judgment I may be found in the valley of Josaphat, among the number of Thy lovers. O Mary, my Queen and my advocate! assist me now; for if I am lost, thou wilt not be able to help me on that day. Thou prayest for all; pray also for one who glories in being thy devoted servant, and who places so much confidence in thee.

SECOND POINT.

The Valley of Josaphat.

After their resurrection, all men will be told by the angels to go to the valley of Josaphat, that there they may be judged, *Nations, nations, in the valley of destruction; for the day of the Lord is near.*[1] When the whole human race will be assembled, the angels will come and separate the reprobate from the elect. *The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just.*[2] The just will stand on the right, and the wicked will be driven to the left. How great would be the pain that you would feel at being driven away from a party of pleasure, or at being expelled from the church! But how much greater will be the pain of those who are banished from the society of the saints! "What think you," says the author of the Imperfect Work, "must be the confusion of the wicked, when, after being separated from the just, they will be abandoned?"[3] This confusion alone would, according to St. Chrysostom, be sufficient to constitute a hell for the reprobate. The son will be separated from the father, the husband from the wife, and the master from the servant. *One shall be taken and one shall be left.*[4] Tell me,

[1] "Populi, populi, in valle concisionis; quia juxta est dies Domini"—*Joel.* iii. 14.

[2] "Exibunt angeli, et separabunt malos de medio justorum"—*Matt.* xiii. 49.

[3] "Quomodo putas impios confundendos, quando, segregatis justis, fuerint derelicti!"—*In Matth. hom.* 54.

[4] "Unus assumetur, et unus relinquetur."—*Matt.* xxiv. 40.

my brother, what place do you think will fall to you? Would you wish to be found at the right hand? If you do, abandon the life which leads to the left.

In this life the princes of the earth and the worldly rich are deemed fortunate, but the saints, who live in poverty and humiliations, are despised. O faithful souls who love God, be not troubled at seeing yourselves in contempt and tribulations on this earth: *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*[1] On the day of judgment you will be called truly fortunate, and will have the honor of being declared as belonging to the court of Jesus Christ. Oh! how beautiful will then be the appearance of St. Peter of Alcantara, who was despised as an apostate! of St. John of God, who was treated as a fool! of St. Peter Celestine, who, after having renounced the papal throne, died in a prison! Oh! how great will then be the honors of so many martyrs who have been torn to pieces by their executioners! *Then shall every man have praise from God.*[2] But on the other hand, how horrible will be the appearance of Herod, of Pilate, of Nero, and so many other great men of this earth, who are now damned! O lovers of the world, in the valley, in the valley I expect you. There, without doubt you will change your sentiments, there you will weep over your folly. Miserable beings, who for the sake of making a figure for a short time on the theatre of this world, will afterward have to act the part of reprobate in the tragedy of judgment. The elect will then be placed on the right; according to the apostle, they will, for their greater glory, be raised in the air above the clouds, and will go with the angels to meet Jesus Christ descending from heaven. *We shall be taken up together with them to meet Christ into the air.*[3]

1 "Tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium."—*John*, xvi. 20.

2 "Tunc laus erit unicuique a Deo."—1 *Cor.* iv. 5.

3 "Rapiemur cum illis in nubibus obviam Christo in aera."—1 *Thess.* iv. 16.

But the damned, like so many goats destined for the slaughter, will be compelled to remain at the left, waiting for the Judge, who will publicly pronounce sentence of condemnation against all his enemies.

But behold the heavens are already opened, the angels come to assist at the Judgment, carrying the symbols of the Passion of Jesus Christ. "When," says St. Thomas, "the Lord comes to judge, the sign of the cross and the other emblems of his passion shall be exhibited."[1] The cross especially will appear. *And then*, says the Redeemer, *shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.*[2] Oh! says Cornelius à Lapide, how great, at the sight of the cross, will be the wailing of sinners who, during life, disregarded their own salvation, which the Son of God purchased at so dear a price! Then, says St. Chrysostom, "shall the nails complain of thee; the wounds, the cross of Christ shall speak against thee."[3] The holy apostles and all their imitators will act as assessors at the general judgment, and shall, together with Jesus Christ, judge the nations. *The just shall shine. . . . They shall judge nations.*[4] Mary, the Queen of angels and saints, will also come to assist at the judgment. Lastly, the eternal Judge will come seated on a throne of majesty and light. *And they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with much power and majesty.*[5] *At their presence*, says the prophet Joel, *the people shall be in grievous*

[1] "Veniente Domino ad judicium, signum Crucis et alia Passionis indicia demonstrabuntur." - *Comp. theol.* p. 1, c. 244.

[2] "Tunc parebit signum Filii hominis; et tunc plangent omnes tribus terræ."—*Matt.* xxiv. 30.

[3] Clavi de te conquerentur, cicatrices contra te loquentur, crux Christi contra te perorabit.

[4] "Fulgebunt justi. . . . Judicabunt nationes."— *Wis* iii. 7 8.

[5] "Et videbunt Filium hominis venientem in nubibus cœli, cum virtute multa et majestate." -*Matt.* xxiv. 30.

pains.[1] The sight of Jesus Christ will console the elect; but in the reprobate it will excite more pain than hell itself. "It would," says St. Jerome, "be easies to bear the pains of hell than the presence of the Lord."[2] St. Teresa used to say: "My Jesus, afflict me with every pain, but do not allow me to see Thy countenance enraged against me on that day." And St. Basil says, "This confusion surpasses all torture."[3] Then will be verified the prediction of St. John, that the damned will call upon the mountains to fall upon them, and to hide them from the sight of an angry judge. *And they shall say to the mountains and rocks: Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.*[4]

Affections and Prayers.

O my dear Redeemer! O Lamb of God, who hast come into the world, not to punish, but to pardon sins; ah! pardon me immediately: pardon me before the arrival of that day on which Thou wilt judge me. Then the sight of Thee, O divine Lamb! who hast borne with me so long and with so much patience, should, if I were lost, be the hell of hells. Ah! I say again, pardon me soon; draw me by Thy merciful hand from the abyss into which my sins have cast me. I repent, O sovereign Good! of having offended Thee, and of having offended Thee so grievously. I love Thee, my judge, who hast loved me so tenderly. Ah! through the merits of Thy death, grant me a great grace, which will transform me from a sinner into a saint. Thou hast promised to hear all who pray to Thee. *Cry to me and I will hear thee.*[5] I do not ask earthly goods: I ask Thy grace, Thy love, and nothing else. Hear me, O my Jesus! through

[1] "A facie ejus cruciabuntur populi."—*Joel*, ii. 6.

[2] Damnatis melius esset inferni pœnas, quam Domini præsentiam, ferre.

[3] Superat omnem pœnam confusio ista.

[4] "Dicunt montibus et petris: Cadite super nos, et abscondite nos a facie sedentis super thronum, et ab ira Agni."—*Apoc.* vi. 16.

[5] "Clama ad me, et exaudiam te."—*Jer.* xxxiii. 3.

the love which Thou didst bear to me when Thou didst die on the cross for my salvation. My beloved Judge, I am a criminal, but a criminal who loves Thee more than he does himself. Have pity on me. Mary, my Mother! come to my aid, and come immediately; now is the time that thou canst assist me. Thou didst not abandon me when I lived in forgetfulness of thee and of God; come to my relief now that I am resolved to serve thee always, and never more to offend my Lord. O Mary! after Jesus, thou art my hope.

THIRD POINT.

The Eternal Sentence.

But, behold! the judgment already begins. The books, which shall be the consciences of each individual, are opened. *The judgment sat, and the books were opened.*[1] The witnesses against the reprobate will be—first, the devils, who, according to St. Augustine, will say: "Most just God, declare him to be mine who was unwilling to be yours."[2] Secondly, they will be their own consciences: *Their own conscience bearing witness to them.*[3] The very walls of the house in which they have offended God will bear testimony, and will cry for vengeance against them. *The stone shall cry out of the wall.*[4] Finally, the Judge himself, who has been present at all the insults offered to him, will give evidence against the sinner. *I am the Judge and the witness, saith the Lord.*[5] St. Paul says, that then the Lord *will bring to light the hidden things of darkness.*[6] He will make known to all men the most secret and shameful sins of the reprobate, which they con-

[1] "Judicium sedit, et libri aperti sunt."—*Dan.* vii. 10.

[2] "Æquissime Judex, judica esse meum, qui tuus esse noluit."—*De Sal. Doc.* c. 62.

[3] "Testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum."—*Rom.* ii. 15

[4] "Lapis de pariete clamabit."—*Hab.* ii. 11.

[5] "Ego sum Judex et testis, dicit Dominus."—*Jer.* xxix. 23.

[6] "Illuminabit abscondita tenebrarum."—1 *Cor.* iv. 5.

cealed even in the tribunal of confession. *I will discover thy shame to thy face.*[1] The Master of the Sentences, along with other authors, is of opinion that the sins of the elect will not be manifested; but will, according to the words of David, be covered: *Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*[2] But St. Basil teaches that with a single glance all will see, as in a picture, the sins of the damned. If, says St. Thomas (*De Hum. chr.* a. 25), in the garden of Gethsemane, at the words of Christ, "*I am He*," the soldiers who came to take him prisoner fell prostrate on the ground, what will be the condition of the damned when, sitting in judgment, he will say to them: Behold, I am He whom you have so much despised?

But now comes the sentence. Jesus Christ will first turn to the elect, and address them in these consoling words: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*[3] So great was the consolation which St. Francis of Assisi felt when he learned by revelation that he was predestined, that he could not contain himself. How great will be the joy of the elect in hearing the Judge say to him: Come, blessed children, come to a kingdom; for you there are no more pains, no more fears; you are and shall be saved forever. I bless the blood which I have shed for you, and I bless the tears which you have shed for your sins. Let us ascend into Paradise, where we shall remain together for all eternity! The most holy Mary will also bless her servants, and will invite them with her to heaven. And thus, singing Allelujas, the elect will enter heaven in triumph, to possess, to praise, and to love God forever.

[1] "Revelabo pudenda tua in facie tua."—*Nah.* iii. 5.

[2] "Beati, quorum remissæ sunt iniquitates, et quorum tecta sunt peccata."—*Ps.* xxxi. 1.

[3] "Venite, benedicti Patris mei, possidete paratum vobis regnum a constitutione mundi."—*Matt.* xxv. 34.

But on the other hand, the reprobate, turning to Jesus Christ, will say to him: What will become of us? Since, the Judge will say, you have renounced and despised my grace, *depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire.*[1] *Depart;* begone from Me; I wish neither to see nor to hear you ever more. *You cursed,* go, and since you have despised my blessing, go accursed. And where, O Lord, will they go? *Into fire,* into hell, to burn both in soul and in body. And for how many years, or for how many ages? *Into everlasting fire;* for all eternity; as long as God shall be God. After this sentence, says St. Ephrem, the reprobate will take leave of the angels, of the saints, of relatives, and of the divine Mother. "Farewell, ye just! farewell, O cross! farewell, O paradise! farewell, fathers and children, for we shall never see any of you again! farewell, O Mary, Mother of God!"[2] Then, in the middle of that valley, a pit will be opened, into which the devils and the damned will fall. O God! they will see those gates closed, never to be opened, never, never for all eternity. O accursed sin, to what a melancholy end will you one day lead so many poor souls! O unhappy souls, to whom this unhappy end is reserved!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Saviour and my God! what sentence shall I receive on that day? If, O my Jesus! Thou now demandest an account of my life, what could I say to Thee but that I deserve a thousand hells? Yes, it is true, O my divine Redeemer! I deserve a thousand hells; but remember that I love Thee, and that I love Thee more than myself; and for the insults I have committed against Thee, I feel so great a sorrow, that I would be content to have suffered every evil rather than have offended Thee. Thou, O my Jesus! condemnest obstinate sinners, but not those

[1] "Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum."—*Matt.* xxv. 41.

[2] "Valete, Justi! vale, Crux! vale, Paradise! valete, patres ac filii! nullum si quidem vestrum visuri sumus ultra. Vale, tu quoque, Dei Genitrix, Maria!"—*De Variis Form. inf.*

who repent and wish to love Thee. Behold me penitent at Thy feet; make me feel that Thou pardonest me. But this Thou hast declared by the mouth of Thy prophet. "Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn to you."—*Zac.* i. 3. I give up all things; I renounce all the pleasures and goods of this world; I turn to Thee, and embrace Thee, O my beloved Redeemer! Ah! receive me into Thy heart, and there inflame me with Thy holy love; but inflame me in such a manner, that I shall never again think of separating from Thee. O my Jesus! save me, and let my salvation consist in loving Thee always, and in singing Thy mercies forever. *The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever.*[1] Mary, my hope, my refuge, and my Mother, assist me, and obtain for me holy perseverance. No one has been lost who has had recourse to thee. To thee I recommend myself; have pity on me.

[1] "Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo."—*Ps.* lxxxviii. 2.

CONSIDERATION XXVI.

The Pains of Hell.

"And these shall go into everlasting punishment."—*Matt.* xxv. 46.

FIRST POINT.

The Pain of Sense.

In committing sin, the sinner does two evils. He abandons God, the Sovereign Good, and turns to creatures. *For My people have done two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns—broken cisterns—that can hold no water.*[1] Since, then, by turning to creatures the sinner offends God, he will be justly tortured in hell by the same creatures by fire, and by devils: in this punishment consists the pain of sense. But because his greatest guilt and the malice of his sin consists in turning his back on God, his principal torment, his hell, will be the pain of loss, or that pain arising from having lost God.

Let us first consider the pain of sense. It is of faith, that there is a hell. In the middle of the earth there is a prison reserved for the chastisement of rebels against God. What is this hell? It is what the glutton who was damned called a place of torments.[2] A place of torments, where all the senses and powers of the damned

[1] "Duo enim mala fecit populus meus: me dereliquerunt, fontem aquæ vivæ; et foderunt sibi cisternas, cisternas dissipatas, quæ continere non valent aquas."—*Jer.* ii. 13.

[2] "In hunc locum tormentorum."—*Luke*, xvi. 28.

will have their proper torment, and where, the more a person has offended God by any sense, the more he will be tortured in that sense. *By what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented.*[1] *As much as she hath glorified herself and lived in delicacies, so much torments and sorrow give ye to her.*—*Apoc.* xviii. 7. The sight will be tormented with darkness. *A land*, says Job, *that is dark, and covered with the mist of death.*[2] How pitiable the condition of a man who is shut up in a dark cave for forty or fifty years, or during his whole life! Hell is a dungeon closed up on every side, into which a ray of the sun, or of any other light, shall never enter. *He shall never see the light.*[3] The fire of this world sends forth light; but the fire of hell is utterly dark. *The voice of the Lord divided the fire.*[4] In explaining these words, St. Basil says, that the Lord will separate the light from the fire, so that this fire will burn, but will not illuminate. Albertus Magnus expounds them more briefly, and says that God "will divide the flame from the heat."[5] The very smoke that issues from that fire shall form a storm of darkness which, according to St. Jude, will blind the damned. *To whom the storm of darkness is reserved forever.*[6] St. Thomas teaches that the damned have only the light which serves to increase their torments. In that glimmering light they will see the deformity of their associates, and of the devils, who will assume horrible forms in order to increase the terrors of the damned.

The sense of smell will also be tormented. How painful to be confined in a close room along with a putrid

[1] "Per quæ peccat quis, per hæc et torquetur."—*Wis.* xi. 17.
[2] "Terram tenebrosam, et opertam mortis caligine.—*Job*, x. 21.
[3] "Usque in æternum non videbit lumen."—*Ps.* xlviii. 20.
[4] "Vox Domini intercedentis flammam ignis."—*Ps.* xxviii. 7.
[5] Dividet a calore splendorem.
[6] "Quibus procella tenebrarum servata est in æternum."—*Jud.* 13.
[7] "Quantum sufficit ad videndum illa quæ torquere possunt."—*Suppl.* q. 97. a. 4.

corpse! *Out of their carcasses*, says the Prophet Isaias, *shall rise a stink.*[1] The damned must remain in the midst of so many millions of the reprobate, who, though forever alive to pain, are called carcasses on account of the stench which they send forth. St. Bonaventure says, that if the body of one of the damned were placed on this earth, it would, by its stench, be sufficient to cause the death of all men. Miserable fools! the greater the number of the damned in hell, the more insufferable will be their torments. "There," says St. Thomas, "the society of the reprobate will cause, not a diminution, but an increase of misery."[2] Their sufferings are more intolerable on account of the stench, on account of the shrieks of the damned, and on account of the narrowness of the place. In hell, they will be one over the other, like sheep gathered together in the winter. *They are*, said David, *laid in hell like sheep.*[3] They will be even like grapes pressed under the wine-press of God's wrath. *And he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness of the wrath of God the Almighty.*[4] From this will arise the pain of immobility. *Let them become immovable as a stone.*[5] Thus, in whatsoever position the damned will fall into hell after the last day, in that they must remain, without ever changing their posture, and without ever being able to move hand or foot, as long as God will be God.

The sense of hearing will be tormented by the unceasing howling and wailing of those miserable beings, who are sunk in an abyss of despair. The devils will torment the damned by continual noises. *The sound of dread is always in his ears.*[6] How painful to a person longing for

[1] "De cadaveribus eorum ascendet fœtor."—*Isa.* xxxiv. 3.
[2] Ibi miserorum societas, miseriam non minuet, sed augebit.
[3] "Sicut oves in inferno positi sunt."—*Ps.* xlviii. 15.
[4] "Et ipse calcat torcular vini furoris iræ Dei."—*Apoc.* xix. 15.
[5] "Fiant immobiles quasi lapis."—*Exod.* xv. 16.
[6] "Sonitus terroris semper in auribus illius."—*Job*, xv. 21.

sleep to hear the groans of a sick man, the barking of a dog, or the screams of an infant! But, oh! how miserable the condition of the damned, who must listen incessantly for all eternity to the clamor and cries of the companions of their torments! The damned will be tormented by a ravenous hunger. *They shall suffer hunger like dogs.*[1] But they never will have a morsel of bread. Their thirst will be so great that all the waters of the ocean will not be able to quench it; but they will never be allowed a single drop. The rich glutton asked for a drop of water; but he has not as yet had it, and he never, never will have it.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Lord! behold at Thy feet one who has so much despised Thy grace and Thy chastisements! Miserable should I be, O my Jesus! if Thou hadst not taken pity on me. How many years should I be in that fetid furnace, in which so many of my companions are now burning! Ah, my Redeemer! why does not this thought make me burn with Thy love? How can I ever again think of offending Thee? Ah, my Jesus! may I never more displease Thee. Strike me dead a thousand times rather than permit me ever again to insult Thee. Since Thou hast begun, complete the work. Thou hast taken me out of the abyss of so many sins, and hast so lovingly called me to love Thee. Ah! grant that I may spend for Thee all the time which Thou now givest me. How ardently should the damned desire a day or an hour of the time granted to me! And shall I continue to spend it in offending Thee? No, my Jesus! through the merits of that blood, which has hitherto delivered me from hell, do not permit it. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good! and because I love Thee I am sorry for having offended Thee. I wish never more to offend Thee, but to love Thee forever. Mary, my Queen and my Mother! pray to Jesus for me, and obtain for me the gift of perseverance and of his holy love.

[1] "Famem patientur ut canes."—*Ps.* lviii. 15.

SECOND POINT.

The Fire of Hell.

The pain which most severely torments the senses of the damned arises from the fire of hell, which tortures the sense of touch. *The vengeance on the flesh of the ungodly is fire and worms.*[1] Hence, in passing sentence, the Lord makes special mention of it. *Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire.*[2] Even in this life, the pain of fire is the greatest of all torments; but according to St. Augustine, our fire, compared with the fire of hell, is but painted fire.[3] St. Vincent Ferrer says, that in comparison with the fire of hell our fire is cold. The reason is, that the fire of this earth has been created for our use; but God has made the fire of hell purposely to torment the damned. As Tertullian remarks: "Fire which is made for the use of man in this world, is very different from that which is used for the justice of God."[4] The wrath of God lights up this avenging fire. *A fire is kindled in my rage.*[5] Hence, the Prophet Isaias calls the fire of hell the spirit of heat. *If the Lord shall wash away the filth of the daughters of Sion . . . by the spirit of burning.*[6] The damned will be sent, not to the fire, but into the fire. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." Thus, like a piece of wood in the furnace, they will be surrounded by fire. They will have an abyss of fire below, an abyss of fire above, and an abyss of fire on every side. If they touch, or see, or breathe, they touch,

[1] "Vindicta carnis impii, ignis et vermis."—*Ecclus.* vii. 19.

[2] "Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum."—*Matt.* xxv. 41.

[3] In cujus comparatione, noster hic ignis depictus est.

[4] "Longe alius est ignis qui usui humano, alius qui Dei justitiæ deservit."—*Apolog.* c. 48.

[5] "Ignis succensus est in furore meo."—*Jer.* xv. 14.

[6] "Si abluerit Dominus sordes . . . in spiritu ardoris "—*Isa.* iv. 4.

and see, and breathe nothing but fire. They will live in fire, like a fish in water. But this fire will not only surround the damned, but will also enter into their very bowels to torment them. Their bodies will become all fire. Thus, this fire will burn the bowels, the heart, the brain, the blood within the veins, and even the marrow within the bones. Each of the damned will be in himself a furnace of fire. *Thou shalt make them as a furnace of fire.*[1]

Some cannot bear to walk under a strong sun, or to remain in a close room before a large fire ; they cannot endure a spark that flies from a candle ; and still they fear not the devouring flames of hell. *Which of you*, says the Prophet Isaias, *can dwell with devouring fire?*[2] As a wild beast devours a lamb, so the fire of hell devours the damned ; but it devours them without ever causing death. "Fools," says St. Peter Damian, addressing the unchaste, "continue, continue to indulge your flesh; a day will come when your impurities, like pitch, will nourish and increase within your bowels the flame which will torment you in hell."[3] St. Jerome says that this fire will bring with it all the pains and torments to which men are subject on this earth—pains in the sides, in the head, in the bowels, in the nerves. In this fire the damned will suffer even the pain of cold.[4] *Let him*, says Job, *pass from the snow waters to excessive heat.*[5] But we must always keep in mind, that all the torments of this earth are, as St. Chrysostom says, but the shadow of the pains of hell.

[1] "Pones eos ut clibanum ignis."—*Ps.* xx. 10.

[2] "Quis poterit habitare de vobis cum igne devorante?"—*Isa.* xxxiii. 14.

[3] "Veniet dies, imo nox, quando libido tua vertetur in picem, qua se perpetuus ignis in tuis visceribus nutriat."—*De Cœlib. sac.* c. 3.

[4] In uno igne omnia supplicia sentiunt in inferno peccatores.

[5] "Ad nimium calorem transeat ab aquis nivium."—*Job*, xxiv. 19.

The powers of the soul will also have their proper torment. The damned will be tormented in the memory by the remembrance of the time which was given to them in this life, that they might save their souls, and which they spent in procuring their own damnation; by the remembrance of the graces which they have received from God, and of which they have not profited. They will be tormented in the understanding by thinking of the great good which they have lost in losing heaven and God, and that this loss is forever irreparable. In the will, by seeing that they will be refused whatsoever they ask. *The desire of the wicked shall perish.*[1] The miserable beings will never have anything which they desire, and will be forever afflicted with the eternal torments which they abhor. They would wish to be rid of these torments, and to enjoy peace; but in these torments they will forever remain, and peace they will never find.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! Thy blood and Thy death are my hope. Thou hast died to deliver me from eternal death. Ah, Lord! who hast partaken more of Thy merits than I, who have so often deserved hell? Ah! do not allow me to live any longer ungrateful to the great graces Thou hast bestowed upon me. Thou hast delivered me from the fire of hell, because Thou wishest me to burn, not in that tormenting fire, but with the sweet flames of Thy love. Assist me, then, that I may satisfy Thy desire. Were I now in hell, I could never more love Thee. But since I am able to love Thee, I wish to love Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O my Redeemer! who hast loved me so tenderly. How have I been able to live so long in forgetfulness of Thee? I thank Thee for not having been forgetful of me. Hadst Thou forgotten me, I should now either be in hell or without sorrow for my sins. This sorrow which I feel in my heart for having offended Thee, and my desire to love Thee ardently, are gifts of Thy grace, which still assist me. I thank

[1] "Desiderium peccatorum peribit."—*Ps.* cxi. 10.

Thee for them, O my Jesus! I hope for the future to give Thee the remainder of my life. I wish to think only of serving and pleasing Thee. Remind me always of the hell I have deserved, and of the graces Thou hast bestowed upon me, and do not permit me ever again to turn my back upon Thee, and to condemn myself to that pit of torments. O Mother of God! pray for me a sinner. Thy intercession has delivered me from hell. Deliver me also, O my Mother, by thy prayers, from sin, which alone can again condemn me to hell.

THIRD POINT.

The Pain of Loss.

But all these torments are nothing, compared with the pain of loss. Hell does not consist in the darkness, stench, shrieks, and fire; the pain which constitutes hell is, the pain of having lost God. "Let torments," says St. Bruno, "be added to torments, and let them not be deprived of God."[1] And St. John Chrysostom says that a thousand hells are not equal to this pain.[2] According to St. Augustine, if the damned enjoyed the vision of God, "they should feel no pain, and hell should be converted into a paradise."[3] To conceive some notion of this pain, consider that, should a person lose a jewel worth a hundred crowns, the loss would occasion great pain, but were the jewel worth two hundred crowns, his pain is doubled; and if it were worth four hundred crowns, the pain is still greater. In a word, the pain which he suffers increases in proportion to the value of what he has lost. What have the damned lost? They have lost God, who is an infinite good. Hence St.

[1] "Addantur tormenta tormentis, ac Deo non priventur."—*Serm. de jud. fin.*

[2] "Si mille dixeris gehennas, nihil par dies illius doloris."—*Ad pop. Ant. hom.* 48.

[3] "Nullam pœnam sentirent, continuo infernus converteretur in paradisum."—*De Tripl. Hab.* c. 4.

Thomas says that the pain of the damned is, in a certain manner, infinite.[1]

This pain is dreaded only by the saints. St. Ignatius of Loyola used to say: Lord, I am willing to bear every pain, but not the pain of being deprived of Thee. But, because they live in the midst of darkness, sinners who are content to live for months and years without God do not understand this pain. However, they will know at death the great good which they lose. At its departure from this world, the soul, as St. Antonine says, instantly sees that it has been created for God.[2] Hence it will suddenly rush forward to embrace its Sovereign Good: but, if it be in sin, God will cast it off. If a dog sees a hare, what efforts does he not make to break his chains and seize his prey. At its separation from the body, the soul is naturally drawn to God, but sin drags it away and sends it to hell, at a distance from him. *Your iniquities*, says the Prophet Isaias, *have divided between you and your God.*[3] The entire, then, of the hell of the damned consists in that first word of the sentence of their condemnation—*Depart from Me, you cursed.* Go, Jesus Christ shall say; I do not wish you ever again to see my face. When Absalom heard that David condemned him never more to appear before him, he said: *Tell my father either to permit me to see his face, or to put me to death.*—*2 Kings*, xiv. 24. To one of his grandees, whom he saw guilty of irreverence in the church, Philip II. said: "Do not dare ever again to appear in my presence." So great was the pain which the nobleman felt, that, after having returned home, he died

[1] "Pœna damnati est infinita, quia est amissio boni infiniti."—1. 2. q. 87, a. 4.

[2] "Separata autem anima a corporis gravamine, intelligit Deum summum bonum et quia ad illum est creata."—P. 4, t. 14, c. 5, § 10.

[3] "Iniquitates vestræ diviserunt inter vos et Deum vestrum."—*Isa.* lix. 2.

of grief. What will be the anguish of the reprobate at the hour of death, when God will say to him: Begone; I will never see you again! *I will hide my face from thee; . . . all evils and afflictions shall find them.*[1] On the day of judgment Jesus Christ will say to the reprobate: You are no longer mine; I am no longer yours. *Call his name not, my people; for you are not my people, and I will not be yours.*[2]

With what pain does a son at the death of a father, or a wife at the death of a husband, say: My father, my wife, I shall never see you again! Ah! if we now heard the wailing of one of the damned, and asked him why he weeps so bitterly, his answer would be: I weep because I have lost God, and shall never see him more. Perhaps the miserable man can love God in hell, and can resign himself to his will? No, if he could do this, hell would not be hell. The unhappy being can never resign himself to the divine will? Neither can he love his God; he hates and will hate him forever; and his hell will consist in the conviction that God is an infinite good, and that he is compelled to hate him, while he sees that he is worthy of infinite love. When St. Catharine asked a devil who he was, he said: "I am that wicked wretch that is deprived of the love of God."[3] The damned will hate and curse God; and in cursing God, they will also curse the benefits he has conferred upon them; they will curse the benefits of creation, of redemption, of the sacraments, particularly the sacraments of baptism and penance, and, above all, the most holy sacrament of the altar. They will hate all the angels and saints, but especially their angel-guardians and their holy advocates, and above all the divine Mother. But they will

[1] "Abscondam faciem meam ab eo, et invenient eum omnia mala." *Deut.* xxxi. 17.

[2] "Quia vos non populus meus, et ego non ero vester."—*Os.* i. 9.

[3] Ego sum ille nequam privatus amore Dei.

principally hate the Three Divine Persons, and among them they will hate in a special manner the Son of God, who once died for their salvation; they will curse his wounds, his blood, his pains, and his death.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! Thou then art my supreme and infinite Good; and I have so often voluntarily lost Thee! I knew that in committing sin I gave Thee great displeasure, and that I lost Thy grace; and with this knowledge I have consented to sin! Ah! if I did not see Thee, O Son of God, nailed to the cross in order to die for me, I should not have courage to ask or hope for pardon from Thee. Eternal Father! look not on me, but behold Thy beloved Son, who asks mercy for me; hear him, and pardon me. I ought at this moment to be in hell, without any hope of being ever more able to love Thee, or to recover Thy lost grace. My God! I am sorry above all things for the injury I have done Thee in renouncing Thy friendship, and despising Thy love for the miserable pleasures of this world. Oh! that I had died a thousand times, rather than have offered Thee so great an insult! How could I have been so blind and foolish! I thank Thee, O my Lord! for giving me time to repair the evil I have done. Since, through Thy mercy, I am not in hell, and can love Thee, O my God! I wish to love Thee. I will wait no longer to convert myself entirely to Thee. I love Thee, O infinite goodness! I love Thee, my life, my treasure, my love, my all. Remind me always, O Lord! of the love which Thou hast borne to me, and of the hell which I have deserved, that this thought may continually excite me to make acts of love, and to say always, *I love Thee, I love Thee, I love Thee.* O Mary, my Queen, my hope and my Mother, if I were in hell, I could never more love thee. I love thee, O my Mother! and in thee, after Jesus, I trust that I shall never again cease to love my God and thee. Assist me; pray to Jesus for me.

CONSIDERATION XXVII.

The Eternity of Hell.

"And these shall go into everlasting punishment."—*Matt.* xxv. 46.

FIRST POINT.

Hell is Eternal.

WERE hell not eternal, it would not be hell. Torments which continue but a short time, are not a severe punishment. The man who is afflicted with an abscess or cancer submits to the knife or the cautery. The pain is very sharp; but, because it is soon over, the torture is not very great. But, should the incision or cauterization last for a week, or for an entire month, how frightful should be his agony! A slight pain in the eye, or in the teeth, when it lasts for a long time, becomes insupportable. Even a comedy, a musical entertainment, would it continue for an entire day, produces intolerable tediousness. And would it last for a month, or for a year, who could bear it? What then must hell be, where the damned are compelled, not to listen to the same comedy or the same music, nor to submit merely to pains in the eyes, or in the teeth, or to the torture of the knife, or of the red-hot iron, but to suffer all pains and all torments? And for how long? For all eternity. *They shall be tortured forever and ever.*[1]

This belief in eternity is an article of faith; it is not an opinion, but a truth attested by God in so many

[1] "Cruciabuntur die ac nocte in sæcula sæculorum."—*Apoc.* xx. 10.

places in Holy Scripture. *Depart from Me, you accursed, into everlasting fire. And these shall go into everlasting punishment.*[1] *Who shall suffer eternal punishment in destruction.*[2] *Every one shall be salted with fire.*[3] As salt prevents putrefaction, so the fire of hell, while it tortures the damned, performs the office of salt by preserving their life.

Now, how great would be the folly of the man who, for the sake of a day's amusement, would voluntarily condemn himself to be shut up in a dungeon for twenty or thirty years! If hell lasted but a hundred, or even but two or three years, it would be the extreme of folly in a Christian to condemn himself to fire for two or three years for the vile pleasure of a moment. But there is not the question of thirty, of a hundred, or of a nundred thousand years; but there is question of eternity; there is question of suffering forever the same torments—torments which will never end, and will never be mitigated in the slightest degree. The saints then had reason, as long as they were on this earth, and in danger of being lost, to weep and tremble. Blessed Isaias, even while he lived in the desert in fasting and penitential rigors wept and said: Ah! unhappy me, who am not as yet free from the danger of losing my soul.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! if Thou hadst sent me to hell, as I have often deserved, and hadst afterward drawn me from it, how deeply should I feel my obligations to Thee! What a holy life would I have begun! And now that Thou hast shown me greater mercy by preserving me from falling into that place of woe, what shall I do? Shall I again offend Thee and provoke Thy wrath, that

[1] "Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum. . . Et ibunt hi in supplicium æternum."—*Matt.* xxv. 41, 46.

[2] "Pœnas dabunt in interitu æternas."—2 *Thess.* i. 9.

[3] "Omnis igne salietur."—*Mark.* ix. 48.

Thou mayest send me to burn in that prison of rebels against Thy majesty, where so many are buried in fire for fewer sins than I have committed? Ah, my Redeemer! I have hitherto done so; and instead of availing myself of the time which Thou gavest me to weep over my sins, I have spent it in provoking Thee still more. I thank Thy infinite goodness for having borne with me so long. If Thy goodness were not infinite, how couldst Thou have borne with me? I thank Thee for having waited for me till now with so much patience. I thank Thee in a most special manner for the light which Thou now givest me, by which Thou makest me see my folly, and the injury I have done Thee in insulting Thee so often by my sins. My Jesus! I detest them, and am sorry for them with my whole heart. Through the merits of Thy Passion, pardon me, and assist me with Thy grace, that I may never more offend Thee. I now have just reason to fear that, if I commit another mortal sin, Thou wilt abandon me. My Lord! I entreat Thee to place this just fear before my eyes whenever the devil will tempt me to offend Thee again. My God! I love Thee; I do not wish ever more to lose Thee; assist me by Thy grace. O most holy Virgin! do thou also assist me. Obtain for me the grace always to have recourse to thee in my temptations, that I may never again lose my God. Mary, after Jesus, thou art my hope.

SECOND POINT.

The Weight of Eternity.

He that enters hell, will not depart from it for all eternity. This thought made David tremble and say; *Let not the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.*[1] As soon as the damned fall into that pit of torments, its mouth is closed never to be opened. In hell there is a gate for admission, but none for egress. "There will be a descent," says Eusebius, "but there will be no ascent."[2] In explaining the words of the

[1] "Neque absorbeat me profundum, neque urgeat super me puteus os suum."—*Ps.* lxviii. 16.

[2] Descensus erit, reditus non erit.

Psalmist, this author says, *and let not the pit shut her mouth;* because when it shall have received them, it will be closed above and opened downward![1] As long as the sinner remains on this earth, he may hope to reverse the sentence of his damnation; but as soon as death overtakes him in sin, all his hopes are at an end forever. *When the wicked man is dead, there shall be no hope any more.*[2] Perhaps the damned may flatter themselves with a false hope, and thus find some relief in their despair. The man who is mortally wounded, confined to his bed, and given over by his physicians, may console himself with the hope of finding a physician or a remedy to heal his wounds. The man who is condemned to the galleys for life may also find comfort in the expectation of being one day delivered from his chains. And may not the damned at least say: Who knows but I shall one day escape from this prison? and thus delude himself with this false hope. No: in hell there is no hope, whether true or false; there is no *perhaps. I will set before thy face.*[3] The unhappy damned will always see the sentence of their reprobation written before their eyes. In it they will read, that they will weep forever in that pit of torments. *And many shall awake: some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always.*[4] Hence the damned not only suffer the torments of each moment, but in each moment they endure the pain of eternity, saying, What I now suffer, I must suffer forever. "They bear," says Tertullian, "the weight of eternity."[5]

Let us then pray to the Lord in the words of St. Au-

[1] "Quia, cum susceperit reos, claudetur sursum, et aperietur deorsum."—*De Epiph. et Inf. hom.* 3.

[2] "Mortuo homine impio, non erit ultra spes."—*Prov.* xi. 7.

[3] "Statuam contra faciem tuam."—*Ps.* xlix. 21.

[4] "Alii in vitam æternam, et alii in opprobrium, ut videant semper."—*Dan.* xii. 2.

[5] Pondus æternitatis sustinent.

gustine: "Here burn, here cut, here spare not, that you may spare for eternity."[1] The chastisements of this life pass away: *Thy arrows pass;* but the pains of the next life last forever, *the voice of Thy thunder in a wheel.*[2] Let us dread these punishments. Let us dread that thunder of eternal damnation which will issue from the mouth of the Judge in passing sentence against the wicked. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." The Psalmist says: "The voice of thy thunder in a wheel." A wheel is a figure of eternity, which has no end. *I have drawn my sword out of its sheath, not to be turned back.*[3] The punishment of hell will be great; but what ought to terrify us more is, that it will be irrevocable.

But the unbeliever will say: Can it be just to punish a sin which lasts but a moment, with eternal torments? But how, I ask, can a sinner, for a momentary pleasure, dare to insult a God of infinite majesty? St. Thomas says that, even in human judgments, the punishment of crime is measured, not from its duration, but from its malice.[4] Hell is but a small punishment for mortal sin; an offence against infinite majesty deserves infinite chastisement. "In every mortal sin," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "an infinite insult is offered to God; but an infinite injury merits infinite punishment."[5] But, because, says St. Thomas, a creature is not capable of suffering pain infinite in point of intensity, God inflicts punishment infinite in extension or duration.[6]

Besides, since the damned are incapable of making

[1] Hic ure, hic seca; hic non parcas, ut in æternum parcas.

[2] "Sagittæ tuæ transeunt, vox tonitrui tui in rota."—*Ps.* lxxvi. 19.

[3] "Eduxi gladium meum de vagina sua irrevocabilem."—*Ezek.* xxi. 5.

[4] "Non, quia homicidium in momento committitur, momentanea pœna punitur."—I. 2. q. 87, a. 3.

[5] "In omni peccato mortali infinita Deo contumelia irrogatur; infinitæ autem injuriæ infinita debetur pœna."—T. ii. s. 12, a. 2, c. 2.

[6] Comp. Theol. p. 1, c. 183.

satisfaction for their sins, their punishment should be necessarily eternal. In this life penitent sinners can atone for their iniquities only in as much as the merits of Jesus Christ are applied to them. But, from the application of these merits the reprobate are excluded. Hence, since they cannot appease the anger of God, and since their sin is eternal, their punishment also must be eternal. *He shall not give to God his ransom. . . . And he shall labor forever.*[1] Hence Belluacensis says: "There sin can be forever punished, and can never be expiated;"[2] for, according to St. Augustine, "there the sinner cannot repent."[3] Therefore the wrath of the Lord shall be always provoked against him. *The people with whom the Lord is angry forever.*[4] Moreover, the damned, though God should wish to pardon them, are unwilling to be pardoned; for their will is obstinate and confirmed in hatred against God. And St. Jerome says that the reprobate "are insatiable in the desire of sinning."[5] Hence, because the damned refuse to be healed, their wounds are incurable. *Why is my wound desperate, so as to refuse to be healed?*[6]

Affections and Prayers.

Then, my Redeemer! if at this hour I were damned, as I have deserved, I should be obstinate in hatred against Thee, my God! who hast died for me. O God! what a hell should it be to hate Thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, who art infinite beauty, infinite goodness, and worthy of infinite love! Then if

[1] "Non dabit Deo placationem suam; . . . laborabit in æternum."—*Ps.* xlviii. 8, 9.

[2] "Culpa semper poterit ibi puniri, et nunquam poterit expiari."—*Spec. Mor.* l. 2, p. 3, d. 3.

[3] Ibi peccator pœnitere non potest.

[4] "Cui iratus est Dominus in æternum."—*Mal.* i. 4.

[5] Insatiabiles sunt in desiderio peccandi.

[6] "Factus est dolor perpetuus, et plaga desperabilis renuit curari."—*Jer.* xv. 18.

I were now in hell, I should be in such an unhappy state, that I would not even wish for the pardon which Thou now offerest to me. My Jesus, I thank Thee for the mercy Thou hast shown me; and since I now can obtain pardon, I wish to love Thee. Thou offerest me pardon, and I ask it from Thee, and hope for it through thy merits. I am sorry for all the offences I have committed against Thee, O infinite Goodness! Pardon me, then. I love Thee with my whole soul. Ah, Lord! what evil hast Thou done me, that I should have to hate Thee forever as my enemy? And what friend have I ever had who has done and suffered so much for me as Thou, O my Jesus! hast done and suffered for me? Ah, do not permit me ever more to fall into enmity with Thee, and to lose Thy love. Take me out of life, sooner than permit this sovereign evil to befall me. O Mary! take me under thy protection, and do not permit me ever more to rebel against God and against thee.

THIRD POINT.

Eternity is Unchangeable.

In this life death is greatly feared by sinners; but in hell it will be most ardently desired. *Men shall seek death, and shall not find it; and they shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them.*[1] Hence St. Jerome has written: "O death, how sweet should you be to those to whom you have been so full of bitterness."[2] David says, that death will feast on the damned. *Death shall feed upon them.*[3] In explaining this passage, St. Bernardine observes that as, in feeding, sheep eat the blades of grass, and leave the roots untouched; so death feeds on the damned: it kills them every moment, but leaves them life in order to continue to kill them by pains for all eternity. Thus, according to St. Gregory, the damned

[1] "Quærent mortem, et non invenient eam; et desiderabunt mori, et fugiet mors ab eis."—*Apoc.* ix. 6.

[2] "O mors, quam dulcis esses, quibus tam amara fuisti!"—*Apud. S. Bonav. Sol.* c. 3.

[3] "Mors depascet eos."—*Ps.* xlviii. 1

die every moment without ever dying. Delivered up to avenging flames, they will die always. A man who dies through pain is an object of pity to all who behold him. Perhaps the damned, too, experience commiseration from others? None; they die every moment, and have not, and never will have, any one to take compassion on them. The Emperor Zeno, being one day shut up in a pit, continually cried out: *For pity's sake, open this grave and release me.* But no one heard him, and he was found dead, after having eaten the flesh off his arms. The damned cry out from the pit of hell, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, but no one comes to deliver them—no one feels compassion for them.[1]

And for how long will this their misery last? Forever, forever. In the spiritual exercises of Father Paul Segneri, written by Muratori, it is related that in Rome, a devil in the body of a man possessed, being asked how long he would remain in hell, began to beat his hand against a chair, and answered in a rage: *Forever, forever!* At hearing this great sermon of two words, *forever, forever*, many students of the Roman seminary, who were present, made a general confession, and changed their lives. Poor Judas! he has spent more than eighteen hundred years in hell, and his hell is still at its commencement. Poor Cain, he is in fire for more than five thousand eight hundred years, and his hell is at its beginning. Another devil was asked how long it was since he had been sent to hell. He answered, Yesterday. "How," said the person who asked him, "could it be yesterday, when you are damned for more than five thousand years? He replied: Oh! if you knew what is meant by eternity, you would easily conceive how a thousand years, compared with it, are but a moment. If an angel said to one of the damned: You will leave hell,

[1] "Lamentantur, et nullus eripit; plangunt, et nemo compatitur."—*Orat. de exitu anni.*

but only after the lapse of as many ages as there are drops of water in the ocean, leaves on the trees, or grains of sand in the sea; he would feel greater joy than a beggar would at hearing of his elevation to a throne. Yes; all these ages will pass away, they will be multiplied an infinite number of times, and hell will be at its commencement. Each of the damned would make this compact with God: Lord, increase my pain as much as Thou wishest, let it last as long as Thou pleasest; but put an end to it, and I am content. But this end will never take place. In hell, the trumpet of divine justice will sound nothing else but these words—*forever*, *forever*, *never*, *never*.

The damned will ask the devils what is the hour of the night. *Watchman, what of the night?*[1] When will it end? When will these trumpets, these shrieks, this stench, these flames, these torments cease? Their answer is *never*, *never*. And how long will they last? *Forever*, *forever*. Ah Lord! give light to so many blind Christians, who, when entreated not to damn themselves, say: If I go to hell, I must have patience. O God! they have not patience to bear the least cold, to remain in an overheated room, or to submit to a buffet on the cheek. And how can they have patience to remain in a sea of fire, trampled by the devils, and abandoned by God and by all, for all eternity!

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, Father of mercies! Thou dost not abandon him who seeks Thee. *Thou hast not forsaken them that seek Thee, O Lord.*[2] I have hitherto turned my back upon Thee so often, and Thou hast not abandoned me: do not abandon me now that I seek Thee. I repent, O Sovereign Good! of having made so little account of Thy grace, which I have exchanged for nothing.

[1] "Custos, quid de nocte?"—*Isa.* xxi. 11.

[2] "Non dereliquisti quærentes te, Domine."—*Ps.* ix. 11.

Look at the wounds of Thy Son. Listen to his cries, which implore Thee to pardon me; and grant me pardon. O my Redeemer! remind me always of the pains Thou hast suffered for me, of the love Thou hast borne me, and of my ingratitude, by which I have so often deserved hell, that I may always bewail the injury I have done Thee, and that I may live always burning with Thy love. Ah, my Jesus! how can I but burn with Thy love, when I reflect that for so many years I ought to burn in hell, and continue to burn in it for all eternity; when I remember that Thou hast died in order to deliver me from it, and that Thou hast with so much mercy rescued me from that land of misery! Were I in hell, I should now hate Thee there, and should have to hate Thee forever: but now I love Thee, and will love Thee forever. Thou lovest me, and I also love Thee. Thou wilt love me forever unless I forsake Thee. Ah, my Saviour! save me from the misfortune of ever leaving Thee, and then do with me whatsoever Thou pleasest. I merit every punishment, and I accept every chastisement, that Thou mayest deliver me from the punishment of being deprived of Thy love. O Mary, my refuge! how often have I condemned myself to hell, and thou hast preserved me from it. Ah, deliver me now from sin, which alone can deprive me of the grace of God, and bring me to hell.

CONSIDERATION XXVIII.

The Remorse of the Damned.

"Their worm dieth not."—*Mark*, ix. 47.

FIRST POINT.

The Little for which the Damned are Lost.

ACCORDING to St. Thomas, this worm which dieth not is to be understood of remorse of conscience, which will eternally torment the damned in hell. The remorse which will gnaw the hearts of the reprobate will be many; but the most excruciating will be, first, the thought of the trifles for which they are damned; secondly, the thought of the little which they required to do in order to save their souls; and thirdly, the thought of the great good which they have lost. After Esau had eaten the pottage of lentils for which he had sold his birthright, the Scripture says that, through sorrow and remorse for the loss, *he began to roar aloud.*[1] Oh! how will the damned howl and roar at the thought of having, for a few momentary poisoned pleasures, lost an eternal kingdom of delights, and of having condemned themselves forever to a continual death! Hence they will weep far more bitterly than Jonathan did when he saw himself condemned to death by his father for having eaten a little honey. *I did but taste a little honey, and behold I must die.*[2] O God!

[1] "Irrugiit clamore magno."—*Gen.* xxvii. 34.

[2] "Gustans gustavi paululum mellis, et ecce morior."—1 *Kings*, xiv. 43.

what torture will each of the damned feel in thinking that he was the cause of his own damnation! At present our past life appears to us but a dream, a moment. But what will he who is in hell think of the fifty or sixty years which he spent on this earth, when he will be in the abyss of eternity, and, after the lapse of a hundred and a thousand millions of years, will see tha this hell only begins? But were these fifty or sixty years all years of pleasure? Perhaps a sinner living without God, always feels happy in his sins! How long do the pleasures of sin last? Only for a few moments. All the remaining hours of the man who lives at enmity with God are full of pain and bitterness. But what will these moments of pleasure appear to the unhappy damned? How will he view that last sin in particular, by which he brought himself to perdition? Then he will say: For a miserable brutal pleasure, which lasted but a moment, and which was scarcely indulged when it vanished like air, I must burn in this fire, in despair, and abandoned by all, as long as God will be God—for all eternity.

Affections and Prayers.

Lord! enlighten me, that I may feel the injustice which I have done Thee, and the eternal chastisements I have deserved, by offending Thee. My God! I feel a great remorse for having offended Thee; but this pain consoles me. Hadst Thou sent me to hell, as I deserved, the thought of the trifle for which I was damned should be the hell of my hell. But now this remorse, I say, consoles me; because it encourages me to hope for pardon from Thee, who hast promised to pardon all who repent. Yes, my Lord! I repent of having outraged Thee. I embrace this sweet pain of remorse. I even entreat Thee to increase it, and to preserve it in my heart till death, that I may always weep bitterly over the offences I have offered to Thee. My Jesus! pardon me. O my Redeemer! who, to procure mercy for me, hadst not mercy on Thyself, but condemnedst Thyself to die through pain in order to deliver me from hell, have mercy on me. Grant

that my remorse for having offended Thee may keep me always sorrowful, and, at the same time, inflame my whole soul with love for Thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, who hast borne with me so patiently, and who now, instead of chastising me, enrichest me with Thy lights and graces. I thank Thee, O my Jesus! and I love Thee. I love Thee more than myself. I love Thee with my whole heart. Thou knowest not how to despise a soul that loves Thee. I love Thee. Do not banish me from Thy face. Receive me, then, into Thy friendship, and do not permit me ever more to lose Thee. Mary, my Mother! accept me for thy servant, and bind me to Jesus, thy Son. Ask him to pardon me, to give me his love and the grace of perseverance till death.

SECOND POINT.

The Little that was Required for their Salvation.

St. Thomas says that the principal pain of the reprobate will consist in seeing that they are damned for nothing, and that, if they wished, they could with so much facility acquire for themselves the glory of Paradise.[1] The second remorse of conscience, then, will arise from the thought of the little that was necessary to be done for the attainment of salvation. A person who was damned appeared to St. Humbert, and said to him that the most excruciating pain which he suffered in hell was caused by the thought of the trifles for which he was lost, and of the little which he required to do in order to save his soul. The unhappy soul will then say: Had I mortified myself by not looking at such an object; had I overcome human respect at such a time; had I avoided such an occasion of sin, such a companion, such a conversation, I should not now be damned. If I had gone to confession every week; if I had frequented the confraternity; if I had read every day a spiritual book; if I had recommended myself to Jesus Christ and to Mary, I

[1] Principaliter dolebunt quod pro nihilo damnati sunt, et facillime vitam poterant consequi sempiternam.

should not have relapsed into sin. I have so often purposed to do these things, but have either neglected my resolutions, or after having begun to practise these exercises, I gave them up, and therefore I am lost.

The torture of this remorse will be increased by the good examples of virtuous friends and companions, which the reprobate has witnessed; and still more by the gifts which God has given him for the salvation of his soul; gifts of nature, such as good health; gifts of fortune, which were so many talents which the Lord had given him, that he might make a good use of them, and become a saint; gifts of grace; so many lights, inspirations, calls, and so many years given to him that he might repair the evil which he had done. But he will see that, in the miserable state to which he is reduced, there is no remedy. He will hear the angel of the Lord proclaiming and protesting that time shall be no more. *And the angel whom I saw standing . . . swore by Him that liveth forever and ever . . that time shall be no longer.*[1] Oh! what cruel swords will all these gifts and graces be to the heart of the unhappy reprobate, when he sees that the time in which he could repair his eternal ruin is already past! With tears and despair he and his companions will say: *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.*[2] He will say: if the fatigues to which I had submitted for my damnation had been borne for God, I should have become a great saint; and now what advantage do I derive from them but pain and remorse, which will torment me for eternity? Ah! the thought that it was in his power to be forever happy, and that he must be forever miserable, will torture the damned more than the fire and all the other torments of hell.

[1] "Et angelus quem vidi stantem . . . juravit per viventem in sæcula sæculorum . . . quia tempus non erit amplius."—*Apoc.* x. 5.

[2] "Transiit messis, finita est æstas, et nos salvati non sumus."—*Jer.* viii. 20.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! how hast Thou been able to bear with me? I have so often turned my back upon Thee, and Thou hast not ceased to seek after me. I have so often offended Thee, and Thou hast pardoned me. Ah! impart to me a portion of that sorrow which Thou didst feel in the Garden of Gethsemane for my sins, and which made Thee there sweat blood. I am sorry, O my Redeemer! for having so badly repaid Thy love. O accursed pleasures! I detest and curse you. You have made me lose the grace of my Lord. My Beloved Jesus! I now love Thee above all things, and I renounce all unlawful gratifications, and purpose to die a thousand times, rather than ever more offend Thee. Ah! through that affection with which Thou dost love me on the cross, and offered for me Thy divine life, give me light and strength to resist temptations, and to have recourse to Thy aid whenever I shall be tempted. O Mary, my hope! thou art all-powerful with God; obtain for me holy perseverance, obtain for me the grace never more to be separated from his holy love.

THIRD POINT.

The Great Good that the Damned have Lost.

The third remorse of the damned shall arise from seeing the great good which they have lost. St. John Chrysostom says that the reprobate will be tormented more by the loss of paradise than by the pains of hell![1] A certain princess once said: *If God gives me a reign of forty years, I will renounce paradise.* The unhappy princess reigned for forty years; but now that her soul has departed from this world, what does she say? Certainly she has changed her sentiments. Oh! how great at present must be her affliction and despair at the thought of having, for the enjoyment of an earthly reign of forty years, lost for eternity the kingdom of heaven!

But the torment which will most grievously torture

[1] Plus cœlo torquentur, quam gehenna.

the damned for eternity will arise from the conviction that they have lost heaven and God, their sovereign good, not by any unlucky accident, nor by the malevolence of others, but by their own fault. They will see that they have been created for paradise, and that God placed in their hands the choice of procuring for themselves eternal life or eternal death. *Before man is life and death; . . . that which he shall choose shall be given him.*[1] Thus they will see that they had it in their power, if they wished, to be eternally happy, and that they have voluntarily precipitated themselves into that pit of torments, from which they can never escape, and from which no one will ever deliver them. They will see among the elect many of their companions, who were placed in the same, or perhaps in greater, danger of sinning, and who saved their souls because they restrained their passions by recommending themselves to God, or, if they fell into sin, soon repented and gave themselves to God. But because they would not give up sin, they have in the end unhappily gone to hell—they have fallen into that sea of torments without any hope of remedy for all eternity.

Brother, if you too have been so foolish as, by your own free acts, to lose paradise and God for a miserable pleasure, endeavor as soon as possible to apply a remedy, now that you have time. Do not voluntarily continue in your foolishness. Tremble lest you should have to weep over your folly for all eternity. Who knows but this consideration which you now read is the last call which God will give you? Perhaps, if you do not now change your life, if you commit another mortal sin, the Lord will abandon you, and, in punishment of that sin, send you to suffer forever among that crowd of fools who are now in hell, and confess their error (*therefore we have erred*), but confess it with despair, because they see

[1] "Ante hominem vita et mors, bonum et malum; quod placuerit ei, dabitur illi."—*Ecclus.* xv. 18.

that it is forever irreparable. When the devil tempts you again to sin, remember hell, have recourse to God and to the Most Holy Virgin. The thought of hell will preserve you from hell, because it will make you have recourse to God. *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.*[1]

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Sovereign Good! how often have I lost Thee for nothing! how often have I deserved to lose Thee forever! But I am consoled by the words of Thy prophet: *Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord.*[2] I must not, then, despair of finding Thee again, O my God! if I sincerely seek Thee. Yes, my God! I now sigh for Thy grace more than for any other good. I am content to be deprived of all things, even of life, rather than see myself deprived of Thy love. I love Thee, O my Creator! above all things; and, because I love Thee, I am sorry for having offended Thee. O my God! whom I have lost and despised, pardon me immediately, and enable me to find Thee again; for I wish never more to lose Thee. If Thou dost admit me again to Thy friendship, I will leave all things, and will seek to love Thee alone. I hope to do so through Thy mercy, Eternal Father! Hear me for the love of Jesus Christ: pardon me, and give me the grace never more to be separated from Thee. If I voluntarily lose Thee again, I ought to fear that Thou wilt abandon me. O Mary, O advocate of sinners! obtain for me the grace to make peace with God, and afterward keep me under thy protection, that I may never more lose him.

[1] "Memorare novissima tua, et in æternum non peccabis."—*Ecclus.* vii. 40.

[2] "Lætetur cor quærentium Dominum."—*Ps.* civ. 3.

CONSIDERATION XXIX.

Heaven.

"Your sorrow shall be turned into joy."—*John*, xvi. 20.

FIRST POINT.

Entrance of a Soul into Paradise.

LET us at present animate ourselves with the hope of heaven, to bear patiently the afflictions of this life, and to offer them to God in return for the sufferings which Jesus Christ endured for the love of us. All these afflictions, sorrows, persecutions, and tears, will one day have an end, and will, if we save our souls, become to us sources of joy and happiness in the kingdom of bliss. This is the ground of courage and hope which the Saviour holds out to us. *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy.*[1] Let us then this day make some reflections on the joys of heaven. But what shall we be able to say on these joys, when the most enlightened of the saints knew not how to give us an idea of that happiness which God has prepared for his faithful servants? David could only say that paradise is a good exceedingly to be desired. *How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts.*[2] But, my beloved St. Paul, do you, at least, who had the happiness of being rapt up into heaven, declare to us some of the things you have seen. No, exclaims the Apostle, what I have seen it is impossible to describe. The delights of heaven *are secret words, which it is not granted to man to*

[1] "Tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium."—*John*, xvi. 20.

[2] "Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum!"—*Ps.* lxxxiii. 2.

utter[1] They are so great that they only who enjoy them are able to comprehend them. All that I can say of them, says the Apostle, is, that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.*[2] No man living has ever seen, or heard, or conceived the beauty, the harmony, the delights which God has prepared for those who love him.

At present it is impossible for us to comprehend the happiness of heaven, because we have no idea but of earthly enjoyments. Were a horse capable of reasoning, he would, if he expected a rich feast from his master, imagine it to consist in excellent hay and oats; for these are the only species of food of which he has any idea. It is thus we form our notions of the happiness of heaven. It is beautiful in the summer to behold at night the starry heaven; it is delightful in the spring to stand on the shore when the sea is unruffled, and to see in its bosom the rocks covered with seaweed, and the fishes gliding through the waters; it is also delightful to be in a garden full of fruits and flowers, ornamented with flowing fountains, and enlivened by the flutter and singing of birds: in such a scene one is tempted to exclaim: Oh! what a paradise! what a paradise! But far different are the delights of heaven. To form some imperfect idea of them, let us reflect that in heaven is an all-powerful God, who has pledged himself to make the soul that loves him happy. Do you wish, says St. Bernard, to know what is in heaven? "There is nothing there that gives displeasure; there is everything that delights."[3]

O God! what will be the sentiments of the soul on its entrance into that happy kingdom? Let us represent to

[1] "Arcana verba, quæ non licet homini loqui."—2 *Cor.* xiii. 4.

[2] "Oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quæ præparavit Deus iis qui diligunt illum."—1 *Cor.* ii. 9.

[3] "Nihil quod nolis sit, totum sit quod velis."—*De Divers.* s. 16.

our minds a young maiden, who, after consecrating herself to the love of Jesus Christ, dies and quits this world. The soul of the young maiden is presented for judgment: the Judge embraces her and pronounces the sentence of her salvation. Her angel-guardian meets and congratulates her; she thanks him for his assistance, and the angel then says: "Rejoice, O happy soul! thy salvation is now secure; come and behold the face of thy Lord." Behold, the soul now passes beyond the clouds, the spheres, the stars, and enters into heaven. O God! what will be her feelings on first setting her foot in this happy country, and beholding, for the first time, this city of delights! The angels and the saints will come to meet her, and will receive her with a joyous welcome. What shall be her consolation in rejoining there her relatives or friends, who have been already admitted into heaven, and in meeting her holy advocates!

The soul will wish to bend her knees to venerate these saints, but they will say: *See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow-servant.*[1] She will thence be carried to kiss the feet of Mary, the Queen of heaven. What tenderness will not the soul experience in first beholding this divine Mother, who gave her so much assistance in the work of her salvation; for then the soul will see all the graces she obtained through the intercession of Mary, who will embrace her with love and tenderness. This Queen of heaven will then conduct the soul to Jesus, who will receive her as his spouse, and will say: *Come from Libanus, my spouse . . . thou shalt be crowned.*[2] My spouse, rejoice: there is now an end to tears, to sufferings, and to fears: receive the eternal crown I have purchased for you by my blood. Jesus himself will then present her to receive the benediction of his divine Father, who shall

[1] "Vide ne feceris; conservus enim tuus sum."—*Apoc.* xxii. 9.

[2] "Veni de Libano, sponsa mea, veni; coronaberis. —*Cant.* iv. 8.

embrace and bless her, saying: *Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord;*[1] and shall bestow upon her the same happiness which he himself enjoys.

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O my God! at Thy feet an ungrateful sinner, whom Thou hast created for heaven, but who has so often, for the sake of a wretched pleasure, renounced Thee to Thy face, and has consented to be condemned to hell. But I hope Thou hast already pardoned me all the injuries I have done Thee, for which I am always sorry, and will be sorry as long as I live. Of these injuries I desire to receive from Thee new pardon. But, O God! although my sins have been already forgiven, it will still be always true that I have dared to afflict Thee, my Redeemer, who hast given Thy life to bring me to Thy kingdom. But may Thy mercy be forever praised and blessed, O my Jesus! for having borne me with so much patience, and for having bestowed upon me multiplied graces, instead of chastising me as I deserved. I see, my dear Saviour! that Thou ardently desirest my salvation, and that Thou wishest to bring me to Thy kingdom, that I may love Thee forever; but it is Thy wish that I should first love Thee here on earth. Yes; I wish to love Thee. Though there were no heaven, I would wish to love Thee while I live, with my whole soul and with all my strength. It is enough for me to know that Thou, my God, desirest to be loved by me. My Jesus! assist me by Thy grace; do not abandon me. My soul is immortal: I must then either love Thee or hate Thee for all eternity. Ah! it is my wish to love Thee for eternity, and I wish to love Thee without reserve here, that I may love Thee without reserve hereafter. Dispose of me as Thou pleasest, chastise me as Thou wishest; do not deprive me of Thy love, and then do with me what Thou wishest. My Jesus! Thy merits are my hope. O Mary! I place great confidence in thy intercession. Thou didst deliver me from hell when I was in sin; now that I wish to give myself to God, obtain for me the grace to save my soul, and to become a saint.

[1] "Intra in gaudium Domini tui."—*Matt.* xxv. 21.

SECOND POINT.

Happiness of Heaven.

When the soul has once entered into the happy kingdom of God, *there will be nothing to molest it.*[1] *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more; for the former things are passed away. And He that sat on the throne said: Behold I make all things new.*[2] In heaven there is no infirmity, no poverty, no distress; there are no longer the vicissitudes of days and nights, nor of cold and heat; but a perpetual day always serene, an eternal spring always delightful. There are no persecutions; no envy. In that kingdom of love, all love one another tenderly; and each rejoices in the good of the other as if it were his own. There are no fears; because the soul, being confirmed in grace, can no longer sin nor lose her God. *Behold I make all things new.* Everything is new; *everything gives consolation and content.*[3] The sight will be filled with delight in beholding this city of perfect beauty. How delightful the view of a city in which the streets are of crystal, the palaces of silver, the ceilings of gold, and all adorned with festoons of flowers! Oh! how much more beautiful the city of paradise! how splendid the appearance of these citizens, who are all clothed in royal robes; for, as St. Augustine says, they are all kings. How delightful must it be to behold Mary, who will appear more beautiful than all paradise! But what must it be to see the Lamb of God, the Heavenly

[1] Nihil est quod nolit!

[2] Absterget Deus omnem lacrymam ab oculis eorum; et mors ultra non erit; neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra; quia prima abierunt. Et dixit, qui sedebat in throno: Ecce, nova facio omnia.—*Apoc.* xxi. 4.

[3] Totum est quod velit.

Spouse, Jesus! St. Teresa had one transient glimpse of one of the hands of Jesus Christ, and was struck senseless by its beauty. The smell will be regaled with odors, but with the odors of paradise. The ear will be delighted with celestial harmony. St. Francis once heard from an angel a single stroke on a violin, and almost died through joy. What then must it be to hear the whole choir of saints and angels chanting the glories of God! *They shall praise Thee forever and ever.*[1] What must it be to hear Mary praising God! St. Francis de Sales says that, as the singing of the nightingale surpasses that of all other birds, so the voice of Mary is far superior to that of all the other saints. In a word, in heaven are found all the delights which can be desired.

But the joys we have been hitherto considering are the least of the blessings of heaven. The good which constitutes heaven is God himself, the Sovereign Good. The reward which God promises us, is not merely the beauty, the harmony, and the other joys of this blessed city; the chief reward is God himself,—that is, to see and love God face to face. *I am thy reward exceeding great.*[2] St. Augustine says that, if God showed his face to the damned, "hell would be instantly turned into a paradise of delights."[3] And he adds that, were a departed soul allowed the choice of seeing God and enduring the torments of hell, or of being delivered from them and deprived of the sight of God, "it would prefer to see the Lord, and to suffer these torments."

During the present life, we cannot comprehend the delight of seeing and loving God face to face: but we may form some notion of it by considering that divine love is so enchanting, that, even in this life, it has sometimes

[1] "In sæcula sæculorum laudabunt te."—*Ps.* lxxxiii. 5.

[2] "Ego sum merces tua magna nimis."—*Gen.* xv. 1.

[3] "Continuo infernus in amænum converteretur paradisum."—*De Tripl. Habit.* c. 4.

raised up from the earth, not only the souls, but even the bodies of the saints. St. Philip Neri was once lifted up into the air along with a bench which he had grasped. St. Peter Alcantara was also elevated from the earth, and a tree which he held was torn up from the roots. St. Vincent, while he was tormented, spoke, says St. Augustine, in such a manner, that one person appeared to suffer and another to speak.[1] St. Lawrence, while he was on the red-hot gridiron, upbraided the tyrant, saying: "Turn and eat."[2] "Yes," says St. Augustine; "for St. Lawrence, inflamed with the fire of divine love, was insensible to the burning heat of the fire."[3] Besides, how great the sweetness which a sinner experiences on this earth even in weeping over his sins! Hence, St. Bernard used to say: "If it is so sweet to weep for Thee, O my God! what must it be to rejoice in Thee?"[4] What sweetness does not a soul experience when, by a ray of light, God unfolds to it in prayer his goodness, the mercies he has shown it, and the love which Jesus Christ has borne, and still bears, to it! In such moments, the soul melts and faints away through love. Yet in this life we do not see God as he is; we see him only in the dark. *We now see through a glass in a dark manner: but then face to face.*"[5] At present there is a veil before our eyes, and God is seen only with the eyes of faith; but what will be our joy when the veil is removed, and we see God face to face? We shall then see the infinite beauty of God; his infinite greatness, his justice, his perfection, his amiableness, and his infinite love for us.

[1] "Tamquam alius torqueretur, alius loqueretur."—*Serm.* 275, E. B.

[2] Versa, et manduca.

[3] "Hoc igne accensus, flammarum non sentit incendia."—*Serm.* 206, E. B.

[4] "Si adeo dulce est flere pro te, quam dulce erit gaudere de te?"—*Scal. claustr.* c. 6.

[5] "Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem."—1 *Cor.* xiii. 12.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Sovereign Good! I am that wretch who has turned his back upon Thee, and renounced Thy love. I therefore am undeserving of seeing or of loving Thee. But, to show mercy to me, Thou hast not shown mercy to Thyself, but hast condemned Thyself to a painful and ignominious death, on an infamous gibbet. Thy death, therefore, makes me hope that I shall one day see and enjoy Thee face to face, and that I shall then love Thee with all my strength. But, now that I am in danger of losing Thee forever, now that I am conscious of having lost Thee by my sins, what shall I do during the remainder of my life? Shall I continue to offend Thee? No, my Jesus! I detest with a sovereign hatred the offences I have offered Thee. I feel a sovereign sorrow for having insulted Thee, and I love Thee with my whole heart. Wilt Thou cast off a soul that repents and loves Thee? No: I know, O my Redeemer! that Thou hast said that Thou wilt not reject any one that comes to Thee with a penitent heart. *Him that cometh to Me, I will not cast out.*[1] My Jesus! I renounce all things, and turn to Thee. I embrace Thee, and unite Thee to my heart: do Thou also embrace me, and unite me to Thy heart. I dare to speak in this manner, because I speak and converse with infinite Goodness. I speak with a God who was content to die for the love of me. My dear Saviour! grant me perseverance in Thy love. My dear Mother Mary! through the love which thou didst bear to Jesus Christ, obtain for me this perseverance. Such is my hope, such is my desire.

THIRD POINT.

Heaven is Eternal.

In this life, the greatest pain which afflicts souls that are in desolation and love God, arises from the fear of not loving him, and of not being loved by him. *Man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred.*[2] But in

[1] "Eum qui venit ad me, non ejiciam foras."—*John*, vi. 37.

[2] "Nescit homo, utrum amore an odio dignus sit."—*Eccles.* ix. 1.

heaven the soul is certain that it loves God, and that he loves it. It sees that it is happily lost in the love of its Lord, and that he embraces it as a beloved child, and that this love will not be dissolved for all eternity. These blessed flames will be augmented by the increased knowledge which the soul will then have of the greatness of the love of God, in becoming man and dying for us; of his love in instituting the Most Holy Sacrament, in which a God becomes the food of a worm. Then also will the soul clearly see all the graces which God has bestowed upon it in delivering it from so many temptations and so many dangers of perdition; it will then understand that the tribulations, infirmities, persecutions, and losses, which it called misfortunes and divine chastisements, were all love, all means intended by divine Providence to conduct it to heaven. It will see particularly the patience of God in bearing with it after so many sins, and the mercies he had shown it in giving it so many lights and invitations to his love. From that blessed mountain it will behold so many souls in hell, condemned for fewer sins than it had committed, and will see that it is saved, that it is in the possession of God, and secure against all danger of ever losing that Sovereign Good for all eternity.

The blessed then will forever enjoy that felicity which, during each moment of eternity, will be always as new as at the first moment of its enjoyment. The soul will always desire and always possess that joy. It shall be always satisfied, and always thirsty: forever thirsty, and always satiated with delights: because the desire of heaven begets no pain, and its possession produces no tediousness. In a word, as the damned are vessels full of wrath, so the blessed are vessels filled with happiness, so that they have nothing more to desire. St. Teresa says that even in this life, when God introduces a soul into the cellar of wine—that is, of his love, it becomes

happily inebriated, so that it loses all affections for earthly things. But in entering into paradise, how much more perfectly, as David says, will the elect *be inebriated with the plenty of God's house.*[1] In seeing God face to face, and in embracing its Sovereign Good, the soul will be so inebriated with love that it will happily lose itself in God—that is, it will entirely forget itself, and will think only of loving, of praising, and of blessing the infinite Good which it possesses.

When, therefore, the crosses of this life afflict us, let us animate ourselves with the hope of heaven to bear them patiently. St. Mary of Egypt, being asked at the end of her life by the Abbot Zozimus, how she had been able to live for so many years in such a desert, replied: *With the hope of heaven.* When the dignity of Cardinal was offered to St. Philip Neri, he threw up the cap in the air, exclaiming, *Paradise! Paradise!* At the mention of paradise, Brother Giles, of the Order of St. Francis, was raised up from the ground through joy. Let us likewise, when we are afflicted by the miseries of this life, raise up our eyes to heaven, and console ourselves, saying with a sigh, *Heaven! Heaven!* Let us reflect that if we be faithful to God, all these sorrows, miseries, and fears will one day have an end, and we shall be admitted into that blessed country, where we shall enjoy complete happiness as long as God will be God. Behold, the saints are expecting us, Mary is expecting us, and Jesus stands with a crown in his hand, to make us kings in that eternal kingdom.

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Jesus! Thou hast taught me this prayer—*Thy kingdom come.* I therefore now pray that Thy kingdom may come into my heart, so that Thou mayest possess it entirely, and that my soul may possess Thee, its Sovereign Good. O my Jesus!

[1] "Inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tuæ."—*Ps.* xxxv. 9.

Thou hast spared nothing in order to save me and to acquire my love; save me then, and let my salvation consist in loving Thee always in this life and in the next. I have so often turned my back upon Thee, and yet Thou assurest me that Thou wilt not disdain to embrace me for all eternity in heaven, with as much love as if I had never offended Thee. And knowing this, can I ever love anything else but Thee, who wishest to bestow heaven upon me after I had so often deserved hell? Ah, my Lord! would that I had never offended Thee! Oh! were I born again I would always love Thee. But what is done is done. I can now do no more than give Thee the remainder of my life. Yes, I give it entirely to Thee. I consecrate myself entirely to Thy love. Depart from my heart, all earthly affections; give place to my God, who wishes to possess it entirely. Yes; take possession of my whole being, my Redeemer, my Love, and my God! From this day forward I will think only of pleasing Thee. Assist me by Thy grace. I hope in Thy merits. Augment in me continually Thy love, and the desire of pleasing Thee. Heaven! Heaven! When, O Lord! shall the day come when I shall see Thee face to face, and embrace Thee, without fear of ever more losing Thee? Ah, my God! keep Thy hand upon me, that I may never more offend Thee. O Mary! when shall I see myself at thy feet in heaven? Assist me, my Mother: do not permit me to be lost, and to go forever to a distance from thee and thy Son.

CONSIDERATION XXX.

Prayer.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; for every one that asketh, receiveth." —*Luke*, xi. 9, 10.

FIRST POINT.

Efficacy of Prayer.

Not only in this, but in a thousand places in the Old and the New Testament, God promises to hear all who pray to him. *Cry to me, and I will hear thee.*[1] "Call upon me, and I will deliver you from all dangers."[2] *If you ask anything in My name, that I will do.*[3] Whatsoever you shall ask through my merits, I will grant. *You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you.*[4] Ask as much as you wish: all that you ask will be given you. There are many other similar passages. Hence Theodoret has said that prayer is one, but can obtain all things. St. Bernard says that when we pray, the Lord will give either the grace we ask, or one that is more useful to us.[5] The prophet animates us to pray by assuring us that God is all mercy to those who invoke his aid. *Thou, O Lord, art sweet and mild, and plenteous in*

[1] "Clama ad me, et exaudiam te."—*Jer.* xxxiii. 3.

[2] "Invoca me. . . . eruam te."—*Ps.* xlix. 15.

[3] "Si quid petieritis me in nomine meo, hoc faciam."—*John*, xiv. 14.

[4] "Quodcumque volueritis, petetis, et fiet vobis."—*John*, xv. 7.

[5] "Aut dabit quod petimus, aut quod nobis noverit esse utilius."—*In Quadr.* s. 5.

mercy to all that call upon Thee.[1] The words of St. James are still more encouraging. *If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth abundantly to all men, and upbraideth not.*[2] This apostle tells us that when we pray to the Lord, he opens his hands, and gives us more than we ask. *He giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not.* He does not reproach us with the offences that we have offered to him; but, when we pray to him, he appears to forget all the injuries that we have done him.

St. John Climacus used to say that prayer in a certain manner forces God to grant us whatsoever we ask of him. "Prayer piously offers violence to God."[3] But it is, as St. Tertullian says, a violence which is dear to him, and which he desires from us.[4] Yes; for, as St. Augustine says, God has a greater desire to give us his graces, than we have to receive them.[5] The reason is, because God is of his own nature infinite goodness. Hence he feels an infinite desire to impart his goods to us. Hence St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to say, that God feels as it were under an obligation to the soul that prays to him; because by prayer it opens to him the way by which he can satisfy his desire of dispensing his graces to us. David says that the goodness of God, in instantly hearing all who pray to him, showed him that he was his true God. *In what day soever I shall call upon Thee, behold, I know Thou art my God.*[6] Some, observes St. Bernard, complain that God is wanting to them; but the Lord far more justly complains that many are wanting to him by

[1] "Tu, Domine, suavis et mitis et multæ misericordiæ omnibus invocantibus te."—*Ps.* lxxxv. 5.

[2] "Si quis vestrum indiget sapientia, postulet a Deo, qui dat omnibus affluenter, et non improperat."—*James*, i. 5.

[3] "Oratio pie Deo vim infert."—*Scala spir.* gr. 28.

[4] "Hæc vis Deo grata est."—*Apolog.* c. 30.

[5] "Plus vult ille dare, quam nos accipere."—*Serm.* 105, E. B.

[6] "In quacumque die invocavero te; ecce cognovi quoniam Deus meus es."—*Ps.* lv. 10.

neglecting to ask his graces. Of this precisely the Redeemer appears to have complained one day to his disciples. *Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name: ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.*[1] As if he said: Do not complain of me if you do not enjoy complete happiness; complain of yourselves for not having asked my graces: ask me for them henceforth, and you shall be satisfied.

Hence, in their conferences, the ancient monks came to the conclusion, that there is no exercise more conducive to salvation than to pray always, and say: "Lord, assist me; incline unto my aid, O God."[2] The Venerable Paul Segneri used to say of himself, that in his meditations he was at first accustomed to spend his time in pious affections; but, having afterward learned the great efficacy of prayer, he endeavored generally to employ himself in petitions to God. Let us always do the same. We have a God who loves us to excess, and who is solicitous for our salvation, and therefore he is always ready to hear all who ask his graces. The princes of the earth, says St. Chrysostom, give audience only to a few; but God gives audience to all who wish for it.[3]

Affections and Prayers.

Eternal God! I adore Thee, and I thank Thee for all the benefits Thou hast bestowed upon me,—for having created me, for having redeemed me through Jesus Christ, for having made me a Christian, for having waited for me when I was in sin, and for having so often pardoned me. Ah, my God! I should never have offended Thee, if in my temptations I had recourse to Thee. I thank Thee for the light by which Thou now makest me understand that my salvation consists in praying to Thee, and in asking graces of Thee. Behold, I entreat Thee, in the name of

[1] "Usque modo non petistis quidquam in nomine meo; petite, et accipietis, ut gaudium vestrum sit plenum."—*John*, xvi. 24.

[2] "Deus, in adjutorium meum intende."—*Ps.* lxix. 2.

[3] Aures principis paucis patent, Dei vero omnibus volentibus.

Jesus Christ, to give me a great sorrow for my sins, holy perseverance in Thy grace, a good death, heaven, but above all, the great gift of Thy love, and perfect resignation to Thy most holy will. I well know that I do not deserve these graces, but Thou hast promised them to all who ask them of Thee through the merits of Jesus Christ; through these merits I hope and ask for them. O Mary! thy prayers are always heard; pray for me.

SECOND POINT.

Necessity of Prayer.

Let us also reflect on the necessity of prayer. St. Chrysostom says that, as the body without the soul is dead, so the soul is dead without prayer. He also teaches that, as water is necessary to prevent the decay of plants, so prayer is necessary to preserve us from perdition.[1] *God wills that all men be saved*,[2]—and is unwilling that any be lost. *The Lord . . . dealeth patiently for your sake, not willing that any one should perish, but that all should return to penance.*[3] But he also wishes that we ask him for the graces necessary for salvation. For, on the one hand, it is impossible for us to observe the divine commands, and save our souls, without the actual assistance of God; and on the other, ordinarily speaking, God will not give us his graces unless we ask them from him. Hence, the holy Council of Trent has declared that God has not commanded impossibilities; because he either gives us the proximate and actual grace to fulfil his precepts, or he gives us the grace to ask him for this actual aid.[4] St. Augustine teaches, that God gives without prayer the

[1] "Non minus quam arbores aquis, precibus indigemus."—*De or. Deo*, l. 1.

[2] "Omnes homines vult salvos fieri."—1 *Tim.* ii. 4.

[3] "Nolens aliquos perire, sed omnes ad pœnitentiam reverti."—2 *Peter*, iii. 9.

[4] "Deus impossibilia non jubet; sed jubendo monet, et facere quod possis, et petere quod non possis."—*Sess.* vi. c. xi.

first graces, such as vocation to the faith and to repentance; but all other graces, and particularly the gift of perseverance, he gives only to those who ask them.[1]

Hence, theologians, after St. Basil, St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, Clement of Alexandria, and others, teach, that for adults prayer is necessary as a means of salvation; so that, without it, it is impossible to be saved. And the most learned Lessius says that this doctrine must be held as of faith.[2]

The Scriptures are clear on this point. *We ought always to pray.*[3] *Pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*[4] *Ask, and you shall receive.*[5] *Pray without ceasing.*[6] The words, *we ought, pray, ask*, according to St. Thomas (3 part, qu. 39, art. 5) and the generality of theologians, imply a strict precept, which binds under grievous sin particularly in three cases. First, when a person is in the state of sin; secondly, when he is in danger of death; and thirdly, when he is in great danger of falling into sin. Theologians teach that, ordinarily, he who neglects prayer for a month, or at most, for two months, is guilty of a mortal sin (*Less., loco citato*). The reason is, because prayer is a means without which we cannot obtain the helps necessary for salvation.

Ask, and you shall receive. He who asks, receives; then, says St. Teresa, he who does not ask, does not receive. And before her, St. James said the same thing. *You have not, because you ask not.*[7] Prayer is particularly necessary

[1] "Constat alia Deum dare etiam non orantibus. sicut initium fidei; alia nonnisi orantibus præparasse, sicut usque in finem perseverantiam."—*De dono pers.* c. 16.

[2] "Fide tenendum est, orationem adultis ad salutem esse necessariam, ut colligitur ex Scripturis."—*De Just.* l. 2, c. 37. d. 3.

[3] "Oportet semper orare."—*Luke*, xviii. 1.

[4] "Vigilate et orate, ut non intretis in tentationem."—*Luke*, xxii. 40.

[5] "Petite, et dabitur vobis."—*Matt.* vii. 7.

[6] "Sine intermissione orate."— 1 *Thess.* v. 17.

[7] "Non habetis, propter quod non postulatis."—*James*, iv. 2.

to obtain the virtue of continence. *And*, said the wise man, *as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it, . . . I went to the Lord, and besought Him.*[1] Let us conclude this point. He who prays, is certainly saved; he who does not pray, is certainly lost. All the elect are saved by prayer; all the damned are lost by neglect of prayer, and their greatest despair is, and will be forever, caused by the conviction, that they had it in their power to save their souls so easily by prayer, and that now the time of salvation is no more.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Redeemer! how have I been able hitherto to live in such forgetfulness of Thee? Thou wert prepared to grant me all the graces that I should ask of Thee; Thou only didst wait for me to ask them. But I have thought only of indulging my senses, and have been indifferent about the privation and loss of Thy love and of Thy graces. Lord! forget all my ingratitude, and have mercy on me. Pardon me all the displeasure I have given Thee, and grant me perseverance. O God of my soul! give me the grace always to ask Thy aid not to offend Thee. Do not permit me to be, as I have hitherto been, negligent in the performance of this duty. Grant me light and strength always to recommend myself to Thee, and particularly when my enemies tempt me to offend Thee again. Grant, O my God! this grace through the merits of Jesus Christ, and through the love which Thou bearest to him. O Lord! I have offended Thee enough. I wish to love Thee during the remainder of my life. Give me Thy love; and may this love remind me to ask Thy aid whenever I am in danger of losing Thee by sin. Mary, my hope after Jesus! through thy intercession I hope for the grace to recommend myself in all my temptations to thee and to thy on. Hear me, O my Queen! through the love which thou bearest to Jesus Christ.

[1] "Et ut scivi, quoniam aliter non possem esse continens, nisi Deus det . . . adii Dominum, et deprecatus sum."—*Wis.* viii. 21.

THIRD POINT.

Conditions of Prayer.

Lastly, let us consider the conditions of prayer. Many pray, and do not obtain the object of their prayers, because they do not pray as they ought. *You ask*, says St. James, *and receive not, because you ask amiss.*[1] To pray well, it is necessary, in the first place, to pray with humility *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*[2] God rejects the petitions of the proud, but does not allow the humble to depart without hearing all their prayers. *The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds, . . . and he will not depart till the Most High behold.*[3] This holds, even though they have been hitherto sinners. *A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*[4] Secondly, it is necessary to pray with confidence. *No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded.*[5] Jesus Christ has taught us to call God, in our petitions for his graces, by no other name than that of *Father*, in order to make us pray with the same confidence with which a child has recourse to a parent. He, then, who prays with confidence, obtains every grace. *All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come unto you.*[6] And who, says St. Augustine, can fear that the promises of God, who is truth itself, will be violated?[7] God, says the Scripture,

[1] "Petitis, et non accipitis, eo quod male petatis."—*James*, iv. 3.

[2] "Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam."—*Ibid.* iv. 6.

[3] "Oratio humiliantis se nubes penetrabit; . . . et non discedet, donec Altissimus aspiciat."—*Ecclus.* xxxv. 21.

[4] "Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies."—*Ps.* l. 19.

[5] "Nullus speravit in Domino, et confusus est."—*Ecclus.* ii. 11.

[6] "Omnia quæcumque orantes petitis, credite quia accipietis, et evenient vobis."—*Mark*, xi. 24.

[7] "Quis falli timeat, cum promittit Veritas?"—*Conf.* l. 12, c. 1.

is not like men, who promise, but do not perform, either because they intend to deceive, or because they change their purpose. *God is not as a man, that he should lie, nor as the son of man, that He should be changed. Hath He told then, and will He not do?*[1] And why, adds the same St. Augustine, should the Lord so earnestiy exhort us to ask his graces, if he did not wish to bestow them upon us? By his promises he has bound himself to grant us the graces we ask from him. "By promising," says St. Augustine, "he has made himself a debtor."[2]

But some will say: I am a sinner, and therefore I do not deserve to be heard. In answer, St. Thomas says that the efficacy of prayer to obtain graces depends, not on our merits, but on the divine mercy.[3] *Every one*, says Jesus Christ, *that asketh receiveth;*[4] that is, says the author of the Imperfect Work, "every one, whether he be a just man or a sinner."[5] But the Redeemer himself takes away all fear, saying: *Amen, amen, I say to you: If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you.*[6] As if he said: Sinners, if you are without merits, I have merits before my Father. Ask, then, in my name, and I promise that you will receive whatsoever you ask. But it is necessary to know that this promise does not extend to temporal favors, such as health, goods of fortune, and the like; for God often justly refuses these graces, because he sees that they would be injurious to our salvation. "The physician," says St. Augustine, "knows bet-

[1] "Non est Deus quasi homo, ut mentiatur, nec ut filius hominis, ut mutetur. Dixit ergo, et non faciet?"—*Num.* xxiii. 19.

[2] "Promittendo, debitorem se Deus fecit."—*Serm.* 110, E. B.

[3] "Oratio in impetrando non innititur merito, sed divinæ misericordiæ."—2. 2. q. 178, a. 2.

[4] "Omnis qui petit, accipit."—*Matt.* vii. 8.

[5] "Omnis, sive justus, sive peccator sit."—*Hom.* 18.

[6] Amen, amen, dico vobis: si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis."—*John*, xvi. 23.

ter than the patient what is useful to him."[1] The holy Doctor adds, that God refuses to some through mercy, what he gives to others through wrath.[2] Hence we should ask temporal blessings only on condition that they will be profitable to the soul. But spiritual graces, such as pardon of sins, perseverance, divine love, and the like, should be asked absolutely, and with a firm confidence of obtaining them. *If*, says Jesus Christ, *you being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him!*[3]

Above all, perseverance in prayer is necessary. In his commentary on the eleventh chapter of St. Luke, Cornelius a Lapide says, that the Lord "wishes us to persevere in prayer even to importunity."[4] This may be inferred from the following passages of Scripture: *We ought always to pray.*[5] *Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times. Pray without ceasing.*[6] It may be also inferred from our Lord's repeated exhortations to prayer. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.*[7] It might be sufficient to have said, *ask;* but no; the Lord wishes us to understand that we ought to imitate beggars, who do not cease to ask, to entreat, and to knock at the gate, until they receive an alms. But final perseverance, in

[1] "Quid infirmo sit utile, magis novit medicus quam ægrotus."—*Ap. S. Prosp.* sent. 212.

[2] "Deus negat propitius quæ concedit iratus."—*Serm.* 354, E. B.

[3] "Si vos, cum sitis mali, nostis bona data dare filiis vestris; quanto magis Pater vester de cœlo dabit spiritum bonum petentibus se!"—*Luke*, xi. 13.

[4] "Vult nos esse perseverantes in oratione, usque ad importunitatem."—*In Luc.* xi

[5] "Oportet semper orare, et non deficere."—*Luke*, xviii. 1.

[6] "Sine intermissione orate."—1 *Thess.* v. 17.

[7] "Petite, et dabitur vobis; quærite, et invenietis; pulsate, et aperietur vobis."—*Luke*, xi. 9.

particular, is a grace which is not obtained without continual prayer. We cannot merit this grace of perseverance; but, according to St. Augustine, it may be merited in a certain manner. "This gift," says the holy Doctor, "can be suppliantly merited; that is, it may be obtained by supplication."[1] Let us, then, if we wish to be saved, pray always, and never cease to pray. And let all confessors and preachers, if they desire the salvation of souls, never cease to exhort their penitents or hearers to prayer. And, in conformity with the advice of St. Bernard, let us always have recourse to the intercession of Mary. Let us ask grace, and ask it through Mary: for what she asks, she obtains, and her prayer cannot be fruitless."[2]

Affections and Prayers.

My God! I hope that Thou hast already pardoned me; but my enemies will not cease to fight against me till death. Unless Thou dost assist me, I shall lose Thee again. Ah! through the merits of Jesus Christ, I ask holy perseverance. Do not permit me to be separated from Thee. And I ask the same grace for all who are at present in the state of grace. I hope, with certainty in Thy promise, that Thou wilt give me perseverance if I will continue to ask it from Thee. But I fear that in my temptations I shall neglect to have recourse to Thee, and that thus I shall relapse into sin. I therefore ask of Thee the grace never more to neglect prayer. Grant that in the occasions in which I shall be in danger of relapsing, I may recommend myself to Thee, and may invoke the aid of the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. My God! this I purpose and hope to do with the assistance of Thy grace. Hear me for the sake of Jesus Christ. O Mary, my Mother! obtain for me the grace that in all dangers of losing God, I may have recourse to thee and to thy Son.

[1] "Hoc Dei donum suppliciter emereri potest."—*De dono persev.* c. 6.

[2] "Quæramus gratiam, et per Mariam quæramus; quia, quod quærit, invenit, et frustrari non potest."—*Serm. de Aquæd.*

CONSIDERATION XXXI.

Perseverance.

"He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved."—*Matt.* xxiv. 13.

FIRST POINT.

Necessity of Perseverance.—Means of Defence against the Devil.

St. Jerome says that many begin well but few persevere.[1] Saul, Judas, Tertullian, began well, but ended badly, because they did not persevere in grace. The Lord, says St. Jerome, requires not only the beginning of a good life, but also the end:[2] it is the end that will be rewarded. St. Bonaventure says that the crown is given only to perseverance.[3] Hence St. Laurence Justinian calls perseverance the "gate of heaven."[4] No one can enter paradise unless he finds the gate of heaven. My brother, at present you have renounced sin, and justly hope that you have been pardoned. You are then the friend of God: but remember that you are not yet saved. And when will you be saved? When you will have persevered to the end. *He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved.*[5]

[1] "Incipere multorum est, perseverare paucorum."—*Cont. Jovin.* l. 1.

[2] "Non quæruntur in Christianis initia, sed finis."—*Ep. ad Fur.*

[3] "Sola perseverantia coronatur."—*Diæt. Sal.* l. 8, c. 2.

[4] "Paradisi janua."—*De Obed.* c. 26.

[5] "Qui perseveraverit usque in finem, hic salvus erit."—*Matt.* xxiv. 13.

Have you begun a good life? Thank the Lord for it: but St. Bernard warns you that to him who begins, a reward is only promised, and is given only to him who perseveres.[1] It is not enough to run for the prize, you must run till you win it. *So run*, says St. Paul, *that you may obtain.*[2]

You have already put your hand to the plough, and you have begun to live well; but now you must tremble and fear more than ever. *With fear and trembling work out your salvation.*[3] And why? Because if—which God forbid—you look back and return to a life of sin, God will declare you unfit for paradise. *No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*[4] At present, through the grace of God, you avoid evil occasions, you frequent the sacraments, and make meditation every day. Happy you if you continue to do so, and if, when he comes to judge you, Jesus Christ will find you doing these things. *Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing.*[5] But do not imagine that, now that you have begun to serve God, there is as it were an end, or a lack of temptations: listen to the advice of the Holy Ghost. *Son, when thou comest to the service of God . . . prepare thy soul for temptation.*[6] Remember that now more than ever you must prepare yourself for conflicts, because your enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh, will arm themselves now more than ever to fight against you in order to deprive you of all

[1] "Inchoantibus præmium promittitur, sed perseverantibus datur."—*De modo bene viv.* s 6.

[2] "Sic currite ut comprehendatis."—1 *Cor.* ix. 24.

[3] "Cum metu et tremore vestram salutem operamini."—*Phil.* ii. 12.

[4] "Nemo mittens manum suam ad aratrum, et respiciens retro, aptus est regno Dei."—*Luke*, ix. 62.

[5] "Beatus ille servus, quem, cum venerit Dominus ejus, invenerit sic facientem."—*Matt.* xxiv. 46.

[6] "Fili, accedens ad servitutem Dei, sta in justitia et timore, et præpara animam tuam ad tentationem."—*Ecclus* ii. 1.

that you have acquired. Denis the Carthusian says, that the more a soul gives itself to God, the more strenuously hell labors to destroy it.[1] And this is sufficiently expressed in the Gospel of St. Luke, where Jesus Christ says: *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through places without water, seeking rest, and not finding it, he saith: I will return into my house whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and entering in, they dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first.*[2] When banished from a soul, the devil finds no repose, and does everything in his power to return: he even calls companions to his aid; and if he succeeds in re-entering, the second fall of that soul will be far more ruinous than the first.

Consider, then, what arms you must use in order to defend yourselves against these enemies, and to preserve your soul in the grace of God. To escape defeat, and to conquer the devil, there is no other defence than prayer. St. Paul says that we have to contend, not with men of flesh and blood like ourselves, but with the princes of hell. *Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers.*[3] By these words the Apostle wished to admonish us that we have not strength to resist such powerful enemies, and that we stand in need of aid from God. With his aid we shall be able to do all things. *I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me.*[4]

[1] Quanto quis fortius nititur Deo servire, tanto acrius contra eum sævit adversarius.

[2] "Cum immundus spiritus exierit de homine, ambulat per loca inaquosa, quærens requiem; et non inveniens, dicit: Revertar in domum meam, unde exivi. . . . Tunc vadit et assumit septem alios spiritus secum, nequiores se; et ingressi, habitant ibi. Et fiunt novissima hominis illius pejora prioribus."—*Luke*, xi. 24.

[3] "Non est nobis colluctatio adversus carnem et sanguinem, sed adversus principes et potestates."—*Eph.* vi. 12.

[4] "Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat."—*Phil.* iv. 13.

Such is the language of St. Paul; such, too, should be our language. But this divine aid is given only to those who pray for it. *Ask and you shall receive.* Let us, then not trust in our purposes; if we trust in them, we shall be lost. Whenever the devil tempts us, let us place our entire confidence in the divine assistance, and let us recommend ourselves to Jesus Christ, and to the Most Holy Mary. We ought to do this particularly as often as we are tempted against chastity; for this is the most terrible of all temptations, and is the one by which the devil gains most victories. We have not strength to preserve chastity; this strength must come from God. *And,* said Solomon, *as I knew that I could not otherwise be continent except God gave it, . . . I went to the Lord, and besought him.*[1] In such temptations, then, we must instantly have recourse to Jesus Christ, and to his holy Mother, frequently invoking the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. He who does this, will conquer; he who neglects it, will be lost.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! "cast me not away from Thy face." I know that Thou wilt never abandon me, unless I first abandon Thee. Experience of my own weakness makes me tremble lest I should again forsake Thee. Lord! it is from Thee I must receive the strength necessary to conquer hell, which labors to make me again its slave. This strength I ask of Thee for the sake of Jesus Christ. O my Saviour! establish between Thee and me a perpetual peace, which will never be broken for all eternity. For this purpose I ask Thy love. "He who loves not is dead." O God of my soul, it is by Thee I must be saved from this unhappy death. I was lost; Thou knowest it. It is Thy goodness alone that has brought me into the state in which I am at present, in which I hope I am Thy friend. Ah, my Jesus! through the painful death which Thou didst suffer for my salva-

[1] "Et ut scivi quoniam aliter non possem esse continens, nisi Deus det, . . . adii Dominum, et deprecatus sum illum."—*Wis.* viii. 21.

tion, do not permit me ever more to lose Thee voluntarily. I love Thee above all things. I hope to see myself always bound with this holy love, and to die in the bonds of love, and to live for eternity in the chains of Thy love. O Mary! thou art called the mother of perseverance; through thee this great gift is dispensed. Through thy intercession I ask and hope to obtain it.

SECOND POINT.

We must Conquer the World.

Let us now see how we must conquer the world. The devil is a great enemy of our salvation, but the world is worse. If the devil did not make use of the world and of wicked men, by whom we mean the world, he would not obtain the victories which he gains. But says Jesus Christ, *beware of men.*[1] Men are often worse than the devils; for these are put to flight when we pray and invoke the most holy names of Jesus and Mary. But when a person gives a becoming answer to wicked companions, who tempt him to sin, they redouble their efforts, they treat him with ridicule, upbraiding him with vulgarity and want of education; and when they can say nothing else, they call him a hypocrite, who only pretends to sanctity. To escape such derision and reproach, certain weak souls miserably associate with these ministers of Lucifer, and return to the vomit. My brother, be persuaded that, if you wish to lead a holy life, you must expect the ridicule and contempt of the wicked. *The wicked*, says the Holy Ghost, *loathe them that are in the right way.*[2] He who lives in sin cannot bear the sight of those who live according to the Gospel. And why? Because their life is a continual reproach to him; and therefore to avoid the pain of remorse caused by the good example of others, he would wish that all should

[1] "Cavete autem ab hominibus."—*Matt.* x. 17.

[2] "Abominantur impii eos qui in recta sunt via."—*Prov.* xxix. 27.

imitate his own wickedness. There is no remedy. The Apostle tells us that he who serves God must be persecuted by the world. *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*[1] All the saints have been persecuted. Who was more holy than Jesus Christ? The world persecuted him so as to cause him to bleed to death on a cross.

There is no help for this; for the maxims of the world are diametrically opposed to the maxims of Jesus Christ. What the world esteems, Jesus Christ has called folly. *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.*[2] And the world regards as folly what Jesus Christ has strongly recommended,—such as crosses, pains, and contempts *For the word of the cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness.*[3] But if the wicked revile and reproach us, let us console ourselves with the reflection that God blesses and praises us. *They will curse, and Thou wilt bless.*[4] Is it not enough for us to be praised by God, by Mary, by the angels, the saints, and all good men? Let us, then, leave sinners to say what they please, and let us continue to please God, who is grateful and faithful to all who serve him. The greater the opposition and difficulty we meet in doing good, the more we shall please God and treasure up merits for ourselves. Let us imagine that we are alone with God in this world. When the wicked treat us with derision, let us recommend them to the Lord, let us thank him for giving us light, which he does not give to these miserable men, and let us continu our journey. Let us not be ashamed to appear lik

[1] "Omnes qui pie volunt vivere in Christo Jesu, persecutionem patientur"—2 *Tim.* iii. 12.

[2] "Sapientia enim hujus mundi stultitia est apud Deum."—1 *Cor.* iii. 19.

[3] "Verbum enim crucis pereuntibus quidem stultitia est."—1 *Cor.* i. 18

[4] "Maledicent illi, et tu benedices."—*Ps.* cviii. 28.

Christians; for, if we are ashamed of Jesus Christ, he protests that he will be ashamed of us on the day of judgment. *For he that shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed, when He shall come in His majesty.*[1]

If we wish to save our souls, we must resolve to suffer, and to do violence to ourselves. *How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.*[2] He who does not violence to himself, will not be saved, There is no remedy. If we wish to do good, we must act in opposition to our rebellious nature. In the beginning, it is particularly necessary to do violence to ourselves in order to root out bad habits, and to acquire habits of virtue. When good habits are once acquired, the observance of the divine law becomes easy, and even sweet. Our Lord said to St. Bridget, that when in the practice of virtue a person suffers the first punctures of the thorns with patience and courage, these thorns afterwards become roses. Be attentive, then, dearly beloved Christian. Jesus Christ now says to you, what he said to the paralytic: *Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.*[3] Remember, says St. Bernard, that if you have the misfortune of relapsing into sin, your relapse will be more disastrous than all your falls.[4] Woe, says the Lord, to them who begin to walk in the way of God, and afterward forsake it. *Woe to you, apostate children.*[5] Such sinners are punished as rebels against God's light. *They have been rebellious to*

[1] "Nam, qui me erubuerit et meos sermones, hunc Filius hominis erubescet, cum venerit in majestate sua."—*Luke*, ix. 26.

[2] "Arcta via est, quæ ducit ad vitam."—*Matt.* vii. 14. "Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud."—*Matt.* xi. 12.

[3] "Ecce sanus factus es; jam noli peccare, ne deterius tibi aliquid contingat."—*John*, v. 14.

[4] "Audis recidere, quam incidere, esse deterius."—*In Cant.* s. 54.

[5] "Væ filii desertores."—*Isa.* xxx. 1.

the light.[1] The chastisement of these rebels, who have been favored by God with a great light, and have been afterward unfaithful to him, is, to remain in blindness, and thus die in their sins. *But if the just man turn himself away from his justice . . . shall he live? All his justices which he hath done shall not be remembered; in the prevarication by which he hath prevaricated, and in his sin which he hath committed, in them he shall die.*[2]

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! such a chastisement I have often deserved, because I have, through the light which Thou gavest me, renounced sin, and have miserably returned to it. I infinitely thank Thy mercy for not having abandoned me in my blindness by leaving me entirely destitute of light, as I deserved. Great then, O my Jesus! are my obligations to Thee, and great should be my ingratitude, were I again to turn my back upon Thee. No, my Redeemer, the mercies of the Lord I will sing forever. I hope that during the remainder of my life, and for all eternity, I will always sing and praise Thy mercies by loving Thee always, and never more seeing myself bereft of Thy graces. The great ingratitude with which I have hitherto treated Thee, and which I now hate and curse above every evil, will serve to make me weep bitterly over the injuries I have done Thee, and to inflame me still more with the love of Thee, who, after I had given Thee so many grievous offences, have bestowed upon me so many great graces. Yes, I love Thee, O my God! worthy of infinite love. Henceforth Thou shalt be my only love, my only good. O eternal Father! through the merits of Jesus Christ I ask of Thee final perseverance in Thy grace and in Thy love. I know that Thou wilt grant it to me whenever I ask it. But who assures me that I shall be careful to ask this perseverance from Thee? Hence, O my God, I ask perseverance, and the grace always to ask it of Thee. O Mary, my advocate, my refuge, and

[1] "Ipsi fuerunt rebelles lumini."—*Job*, xxiv. 13.

[2] "Si autem averterit se justus a justitia sua, ... numquid vivet? Omnes justitiæ ejus, quas fecerat, non recordabuntur; . . . in peccato suo morietur."—*Ezek.* xviii. 24.

my hope! obtain for me by thy intercession the gift of constancy in always asking of God the grace of final perseverance. Through the love which thou bearest Jesus Christ, I ask thee to obtain for me this gift.

THIRD POINT.

We must Struggle against the Flesh.—Recapitulation.

Let us come to the third enemy—that is, the flesh, which is the worst of all: and let us see how we must defend ourselves against its attacks. The first means is prayer: but this we have already considered. The second is, to avoid the occasion of sin; and let us now ponder well upon this means of overcoming the flesh. St. Bernardine says that the greatest of all counsels, and the one which is, as it were, the foundation of religion, is to fly from sinful occasions.[1] Being compelled by exorcisms, the devil once confessed that of all sermons, that which displeased him most was the sermon on avoiding the occasions of sin: and justly; for the devil laughs at all the resolutions and promises of penitent sinners who remain in the occasion of sin. The occasion of sins of the flesh, in particular, is like a veil placed before the eyes, which prevents the soul from seeing either its resolutions, or the lights received from God, or the truths of eternity: in a word, it makes it forget everything, and almost blinds it. The neglect of avoiding the occasions of sin was the cause of the fall of our first parents. God had forbidden them even to touch the forbidden fruit. *God commanded us*, said Eve, *that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it.*[2] But through want of caution she *saw, took, and ate it.* She first began to look at the apple, she afterward took it in her hand, and then ate it. He who

[1] "Inter consilia Christi, unum celeberrimum quasi religionis fundamentum est, fugere peccatorum occasiones."—T. i. s. 21, a. 3.

[2] "Præcepit nobis Deus, ne comederemus, et ne tangeremus illud."—*Gen.* iii. 3

voluntarily exposes himself to danger, will perish in it.[1] St. Peter tells us that the devil *goeth about seeking whom he may devour.*[2] And what, says St. Cyprian, does he do in order to enter again into the soul from which he has been expelled?[3] He seeks an occasion of sin. If the soul permit him to bring it again into the occasion of sin, he will enter again, and shall devour it. The Abbot Guerric says that Lazarus came forth from the grave bound hand and foot,[4] and after rising in this state, he died again. Miserable, this author means to say, is the man who rises from sin bound by the occasion of sin; though he should rise, he surely will die again. He, then, who wishes to be saved must forsake not only all sin, but the occasions of sin—that is, the companions, the house, the connections which lead to sin.

But you will say: I have changed my life, and now I have no bad motive, nor even a temptation, in the society of such a person. I answer: it is related that in Mauritania there are bears that go in search of the apes. As soon as they see a bear, the apes save themselves by climbing up the trees: but what does the bear do? He stretches himself, as if dead, under the tree; and when the apes descend, he springs up, seizes, and devours them. It is thus the devil acts: he makes the temptations appear dead; and when the soul exposes itself to the occasions of sin, he excites the temptation, which devours it. Oh! how many miserable souls, that practised mental prayer, frequented Communion, and might be called saints, have, by putting themselves into dangerous occasions, become the prey of hell? It is related in ecclesiastical history, that a holy matron, who devoted herself to the pious work of burying the martyrs, found

[1] "Qui amat periculum in illo peribit."—*Ecclus.* iii. 27.

[2] "Circuit quærens quem devoret."—1 *Peter*, v. 8.

[3] "Explorat an sit pars, cujus aditu penetretur."—*De zelo et liv.*

[4] Prodiit ligatus manibus et pedibus.

one of them not dead. She brought him to her house: he recovered. What happened? By the proximate occasion, these two saints, as they might be called, first lost the grace of God, and afterward lost the faith.

The Lord commanded Isaias to proclaim that *all flesh is grass.*[1] Is it possible, says St. John Chrysostom, for hay not to burn when it is thrown into the fire?[2] And St. Cyprian says that it is impossible to stand in the midst of flames, and not be burned.[3] According to the prophet Isaias, our strength is like that of tow cast into the fire. *And your strength shall be as the ashes of tow.*[4] And Solomon says that it would be folly to expect to walk on red-hot coals, without being burned. *Can a man walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?*[5] Thus it is likewise folly to expose ourselves to the occasion of sin, and to expect not to fall. It is necessary then to fly from sin as from the face of a serpent. *Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent.*[6] We ought, says Gualfrido, not only to avoid the bite or contact of a serpent, but should also abstain from approaching it.[7] But you will say: My interest requires that I should frequent such a house, or that I should keep up a certain friendship. But if you see that such a house is for you a way to hell, there is no remedy; you must forsake it if you wish to save your soul. *Her house is the way to hell.*[8] The Lord tells you that if your right eye is a cause of damnation to

[1] "Clama: Omnis caro fenum."—*Isa.* xl. 6.

[2] "Lucernam in fenum pone, ac tum aude negare quod fenum exuratur."—*In Ps.* l. hom. 1.

[3] "Impossibile est flammis circumdari, et non ardere."—*De Singul. cler.*

[4] "Et erit fortitudo vestra ut favilla stupæ."—*Isa.* i. 31.

[5] "Numquid potest homo . . . ambulare super prunas, ut non comburantur plantæ ejus?"—*Prov.* vi. 27.

[6] "Quasi a facie colubri, fuge peccata."—*Ecclus.* xxi. 2.

[7] Fuge etiam tactus, etiam accessum.

[8] "Viæ inferi, domus ejus."—*Prov.* vii. 27.

you, you must pluck it out and cast it from you.[1] Mark the words; you must cast it, not beside you, but to a distance *from you*—that is, you must take away every occasion of sin. St. Francis of Assisi says, that the devil tempts spiritual souls, who have given themselves to God, in a way different from that in which he tempts the wicked. In the beginning he does not seek to bind them with a chain; he is content to hold them by a single hair: he then binds them with a slender thread; afterward with a cord; then with a chain; and thus drags them to sin. And therefore he who wishes to be free from the danger of perdition must, in the beginning, break all these hairs, he must avoid all occasions of sins, he must give up these salutations, presents, notes, and the like. And for those who have contracted a habit of committing sins against purity, it will not be enough to avoid proximate occasions: unless they fly even from remote occasions, they will relapse.

He who sincerely wishes to be saved, must, by often repeating with the saints, *Let all be lost, provided God is not lost*, labor continually to strengthen and renew his resolution of never again renouncing the friendship of God. But it is not enough to resolve never more to lose God; it is moreover necessary to adopt the means by which you may be preserved from the danger of losing him. The first means is, to avoid the occasions of sin; of this we have already spoken. The second is, to frequent the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. In the house which is often swept there is no uncleanness. By the sacrament of penance the soul is purified; by it it obtains not only the remission of sins, but also help to resist temptations. The Communion is called the bread of heaven; because as the body cannot live without earthly food, so the soul cannot live without this celestial

[1] "Si oculus tuus dexter scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te."—*Matt.* v. 29.

bread. *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.*[1] But on the other hand, to those who frequently eat this bread, is promised eternal life. *If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever.*[2] Hence the Council of Trent calls the Communion a medicine which delivers us from venial, and preserves us from mortal sins.[3] The third means is meditation, or mental prayer. *Remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.*[4] He who keeps before his eyes the eternal truths—death, judgment, eternity—will not fall into sin. God enlightens us in meditation. *Come ye to Him, and be enlightened.*[5] In meditation God speaks to us, and makes known to us what we are to avoid, and what we are to do. *I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart.*[6] Meditation is the blessed furnace in which divine love is lighted up. *In my meditation a fire shall flame out.*[7] To preserve the soul in the grace of God, it is, as has been already said, absolutely necessary always to pray, and to ask for the graces we stand in need of. They who do not make mental prayer, will scarcely pray for God's graces; and by neglecting to pray for them, they will certainly be lost.

It is necessary then to adopt the means of salvation, and to lead a life of order and regularity. It is necessary, after rising in the morning, to make the Christian acts of thanksgiving, love, oblation, and a purpose of

[1] "Nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, et biberitis ejus sanguinem, non habebitis vitam in vobis."—*John*, vi. 54.

[2] "Si quis manducaverit ex hoc pane, vivet in æternum."—*John*, vi. 52.

[3] "Antidotum quo liberemur a culpis quotidianis, et a peccatis mortalibus præservemur."—Sess. 13, cap. 2.

[4] "Memorare novissima tua, et in æternum non peccabis."—*Ecclus.* vii. 40.

[5] "Accedite ad eam, et illuminamini."—*Ps.* xxxiii. 6.

[6] "Ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus."—*Osee*, ii. 14.

[7] "In meditatione mea exardescet ignis."—*Ps.* xxxviii. 4.

avoiding sin, along with a prayer to Jesus and Mary that they may preserve you from sin during the day: you should afterward make your meditation, and hear Mass. During the day you ought to make a spiritual reading, visit the Blessed Sacrament and an image of the divine Mother. In the evening, say the rosary, and make an examination of conscience. Go to Communion several times in the week, according as your director may advise: you should ordinarily go to confession to the same confessor. It would also be very profitable to make the spiritual exercises in some religious house. It is likewise necessary to honor the Most Holy Mary by some special devotion—such as by fasting on Saturdays. She is called the Mother of perseverance, and she promises to obtain it for all who serve her. *They that work by me shall not sin.*[1] Above all, it is necessary to ask of God holy perseverance, and especially in the time of temptation, invoking then more frequently the names of Jesus and Mary as long as the temptation continues. If you act in this manner, you will certainly be saved; if not, you will certainly be lost.*

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Redeemer! I thank Thee for the lights which Thou now givest me, and for the means of salvation which Thou makest known to me. I promise to endeavor to persevere in the practice of them. I see that Thou wishest for my salvation; and I wish to be saved principally to please Thy heart, which so ardently desires my salvation. O my God! I will no longer resist the love which Thou entertainest for me. This love has made Thee bear me with so much patience when I offended Thee. Thou callest me to Thy love, and I desire only to love Thee. I

[1] "Qui operantur in me non peccabunt."—*Ecclus.* xxiv. 30.

* We must here remark that the means of perseverance so much recommended by St. Alphonsus are nothing else than a good Rule of Life, which is given in the last part of this volume.—ED.

love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O infinite Good! Ah! I entreat Thee, through the merits of Jesus Christ, not to permit me to be ever again ungrateful to Thee; either make me cease to be ungrateful to Thee, or make me cease to live. Lord! Thou hast already begun the work; bring it to perfection, *Confirm, O God! that which Thou hast wrought in me.*[1] Give me light, give me strength, give me love. O Mary! who art the treasurer of graces, assist me, accept me for thy servant, and pray to Jesus for me. Through the merits of Jesus Christ first, and then through thy prayers, I hope for salvation.

[1] "Confirma hoc, Deus, quod operatus es in nobis."—*Ps.* lxvii. 29.

CONSIDERATION XXXII.

Confidence in the Patronage of Mary.

"He that shall find me, shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord."—*Prov.* viii. 35.

FIRST POINT.

Power of Mary.

Oh! how great will be our thankfulness to the mercy of God, for having given us for our advocate, Mary, who, by her prayers, can obtain for us all the graces we stand in need of. "Truly wonderful," exclaims St. Bonaventure, "is the bounty of our God, who has given thee, O Lady, to his guilty subjects as their advocate, so that thou art able to obtain for them by thy assistance whatever thou wilt."[1] Sinners, brethren, if we find ourselves debtors to the divine justice, and condemned to hell by our sins, let us not despair; let us have recourse to this divine mother; let us put ourselves under her protection, and she will save us. But we must have a sincere purpose of amending our lives. If we have such a purpose, and place confidence in Mary, we shall be saved. And why? Because Mary is a *powerful* advocate, a *merciful* advocate, an advocate *that desires to save all.*

In the first place, let us consider that Mary is a *powerful* advocate, who can obtain from the Judge all graces

[1] "O certe Dei nostri mira benignitas, qui suis reis te, Dominam, tribuit Advocatum, ut, quod volueris, pro nobis valeas impetrare"—*Stim. am.* p. 3, c. 19.

for her servants. This is a singular privilege, given to her by the Judge himself, who is her Son. "It is a great privilege, that Mary is most powerful with her Son."[1] John Gerson says that the Blessed Virgin asks nothing from God with an absolute will, which she does not obtain; and that, like a queen, she sends the angels to enlighten, to purify, and to perfect her servants. Hence, to inspire confidence in this great advocate, the Church makes us invoke her under the title of Powerful Virgin. *Powerful Virgin, pray for us.*[2] And why is the patronage of Mary so powerful? Because she is the Mother of God. "The prayer of the divine Mother," says St. Antoninus, "partakes of the nature of a command, and therefore it is impossible for her not to be heard."[3] The prayers of Mary are the prayers of a mother, and are therefore regarded by Jesus Christ, in a certain manner, as commands; hence it is impossible that her petitions should be rejected. St. George, Archbishop of Nicomedia, says that the Redeemer, as if to discharge the obligation which he owes to his mother for having given to him his human nature, hears all her prayers. Hence, St. Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, has written, "The Son is pleased that his Mother should pray to him, because he wishes to grant her whatsoever she asks, in order to repay her for the favor received from her in giving him flesh."[4] Hence the martyr St. Methodius exclaimed: "Rejoice, rejoice, O Mary! thou hast for a debtor thy Son. We are all debtors to him; but he is a debtor to thee alone."[5]

[1] "Grande privilegium, quod Maria apud Filium sit potentissima."—*St. Bonav. in Spec.* lect. vi.

[2] Virgo potens, ora pro nobis.

[3] "Oratio Deiparæ habet rationem imperii; unde impossibile est eam non exaudiri."—P. 4, t. 15, c. 17, § 4.

[4] "Filius, quasi exsolvens debitum, petitiones tuas implet."—*Or. de Ingr. B. V.*

[5] "Euge, euge, quæ debitorem habes Filium! Deo enim universi debemus, tibi autem ille debitor est."—*Or. de Sim. et Ann.*

Hence Cosmas of Jerusalem says that the intercession of Mary is omnipotent.[1] Yes, her prayers are omnipotent, because, as Richard of St. Laurence says, it is but just that the Mother should partake of the power of the Son. The Son, then, who is omnipotent, has made the Mother omnipotent.[2] The Son is omnipotent by nature; the Mother is omnipotent by grace—that is, she obtains by her prayers whatsoever she asks, as is happily expressed in the celebrated verse: "What God doeth by right, thou, O Virgin, dost by prayer."[3] This was revealed to St. Bridget, who one day heard Jesus Christ addressing his mother in the following words: "Ask from me what you wish; for your petition cannot be fruitless."[4] My mother, ask as much as you please; for I shall hear all your prayers. He then subjoins the reason. "Because you refused me nothing on earth, I will refuse nothing to you in heaven."[5] You refused me nothing when I lived on earth; it is just that I should refuse nothing to you now that you are with me in heaven.

In fine, there is no sinner, however abandoned, whom Mary cannot save by her intercession. "You have," says St. George of Nicomedia, "insuperable strength, lest the multitude of our sins should overcome your clemency. Nothing resists your power; for the Creator regards your glory as his own."—*Orat. de Exit. B. V.* O Mother of God, nothing can resist thy power, since thy Creator regards

[1] "Omnipotens auxilium tuum, O Maria."—*Hymn 6 in depr. ad Deip.*

[2] Cum autem eadem sit potestas Matris et Filii, ab omnipotente Filio omnipotens Mater effecta est.

[3] Quod Deus imperio, tu prece, Virgo, potes!

[4] "Pete quod vis; non enim inanis potest esse petitio tua."—*Rev.* l. 6, c. 23.

[5] "Quia tu mihi nihil negasti in terra ego tibi nihil negabo in cœlo."—*Rev.* l. 1, c. 24.

thy glory as his own."[1] "Nothing, then," says St. Peter Damian, "is impossible to thee, who can raise even those who are in despair to a hope of salvation."[2]

Affections and Prayers.

My dear Queen and Mother, Mary, I will address thee in the words of St. Germanus: "Thou art omnipotent in saving sinners; thy prayers are all-powerful with God, because thou art the mother of true life."—*Serm.* iii. in Dom. B. V. Then, O my mistress, if I have recourse to thee, all my sins cannot make me despair of salvation. Thou obtainest by thy prayers whatever thou wishest. If thou prayest for me I shall certainly be saved. I will then say to thee with St. Bernard: Pray for me, who am so miserable, O great Mother of God, for thy Son hears thee, and grants whatsoever thou askest.[3] I am indeed a sinner; but I wish to amend my life, and I glory in being specially devoted to thee. I am, it is true, unworthy of thy protection; but I know that thou hast never abandoned any one who has placed his trust in thee. Thou art able and willing to save me, and I trust in thee. When I was in the state of perdition, and forgetful of thee, thou didst think of me, and didst obtain for me the grace to enter into myself. How much more ought I to trust in thy mercy now that I am dedicated to thy service, and that I recommend myself with confidence to thy prayers! O Mary! pray for me, and obtain for me the grace to be a saint. Obtain for me holy perseverance; obtain for me a great love of thy Son, and of thee, O my amiable mother! I love thee, O my Queen! and hope to love thee always. Do thou also love me, and obtain for me the grace that I may be transformed from a sinner into a saint.

[1] "Habes vires insuperabiles, ne clementiam tuam superet multitudo peccatorum. Nihil tuæ resistit potentiæ; tuam enim gloriam Creator existimat esse propriam."—*Or. de Ingr. B. V.*

[2] "Nil tibi impossibile, cui possibile est desperatos in spem beatitudinis relevare."—*De Nat. B. V.* s. 1.

[3] "Loquere, Domina, quia audit Filius tuus; et quæcumque petieris, impetrabis."—*Depr. ad glor. V.*

SECOND POINT.

Mercy of Mary.

Let us consider, in the second place, that Mary is an advocate as merciful as she is powerful, and that she knows not how to refuse her protection to any soul that has recourse to her. The eyes of the Lord, says David, are upon the just; and this mother of mercy, says Richard of St. Laurence, keeps her eyes upon the just and upon sinners, that she may preserve them from falling into sin, or that, should they fall, she may raise them up.[1] St. Bonaventure used to say that, in looking at Mary, he seemed to behold mercy itself.[2] Hence St. Bernard exhorts us to recommend ourselves with great confidence in all our necessities to this powerful advocate, who is all sweetness and benignity to those who invoke her intercession.[3] Hence Mary is called an olive-tree. *As a fair olive-tree in the plains.*[4] As from the olive-tree nothing comes forth but oil, the symbol of mercy; so from the hands of Mary nothing flows but the graces and mercies which she dispenses to all who take shelter under her protection. Hence Denis the Carthusian has justly called her the "advocate of all sinners who have recourse to her."[5] O God! how great will be the remorse of the damned Christian in thinking that, during life, he could have saved his soul with so much facility by invoking the intercession of this mother of mercy; that he had not

[1] "Sed oculi Dominæ super justos et peccatores, sicut oculi matris ad puerum, ne cadat, vel, si ceciderit, ut sublevet."—*De laud. B. M.* l. 5.

[2] "Certe, Domina, cum te aspicio, nihil nisi misericordiam cerno."—*Stim. am.* p. 3, c. 19.

[3] "Quid ad Mariam accedere trepidet humana fragilitas? Nihil austerum in ea, nihil terribile; tota suavis est."—*In sign. magn.*

[4] "Quasi oliva speciosa in campis."—*Ecclus.* xxiv. 19.

[5] "Advocata omnium iniquorum ad se confugientium."—*De Laud. B. V.* l. 2, a. 23.

done so; and that there will be no more time to do it! The Blessed Virgin said one day to St. Bridget: I am called, and I really am, the Mother of mercy; for such God has made me.[1] "I am called by all the Mother of mercy, and truly his mercy has made me merciful."—*Rev.* lib. i. cap. vi. And who, but God in his mercy, because he desires our salvation, has given us this advocate to defend us? "Therefore," adds Mary, "miserable will he be, who, while it is in his power, has not recourse to me, who am merciful."[2] Miserable is the man, and miserable for eternity, who, though he could, during life, have recommended himself to me, who am so benign and merciful to all, has neglected to have recourse to me, and is lost.

Perhaps, says St. Bonaventure, we are afraid that in asking Mary's intercession she will refuse it to us? No, says the saint: "Mary does not refuse, and never has refused pity and aid to any sinner who has invoked her intercession."[3] She has not done so, and she cannot do so; because God has made her the queen and the mother of mercy; and as queen of mercy she is bound to attend to the care of the miserable. "Thou," says St. Bernard. "art the queen of mercy; and who but the miserable are the subjects of mercy?"[4] Hence the saint through humility adds: Since then, O Mother of God! thou art the queen of mercy, thou must have a special care of me, who am the most miserable of sinners.[5] As mother of

[1] "Ego vocor ab omnibus Mater misericordiæ, et vere misericordia Filii mei fecit me misericordem."—*Rev.* l. 2, c. 23.

[2] Ideo miser erit, qui ad misericordiam, cum possit, non accedit.

[3] "Ipsa enim non misereri ignorat, et miseris non satisfacere nunquam scivit."—*Stim. am.* p. 3, c. 13.

[4] Tu es Regina misericordiæ; et qui misericordiæ subditi, nisi miseri?

[5] "Tu Regina misericordiæ, et ego miserrimus peccator, subditorum maximus; rege nos ergo, O Regina misericordiæ."—*Paciucch. In Salve Reg.* exc. 2.

mercy it is her duty to deliver from death her sick children, to whom her mercy makes her a mother. Hence, St. Basil calls her a public hospital.[1] Public hospitals are erected for the poor; and they who are in the greatest poverty have the best claims to be admitted into them. Hence, according to St. Basil, Mary ought to receive with the greatest tenderness and care the greatest sinners who have recourse to her.

But let us not doubt of the mercy of Mary One day St. Bridget heard the Saviour saying to his mother: "Thou wouldst show compassion to the devil, should he ask it with humility."[2] The haughty Lucifer will never humble himself to ask her prayers; but if he humbled himself to this divine mother, and invoked her help, she, by her intercession would deliver him from hell. By those words, Jesus Christ wished to give us to understand what Mary herself afterward said to the same St. Bridget—that when a sinner has recourse to her, however enormous his guilt may be, she regards not the sins with which he is charged, but the intention with which he comes. If he come with a sincere desire to amend, she receives him and heals all his wounds.[3] Hence St. Bonaventure says: "Poor sinners! do not despair; raise your eyes to Mary, and trust in the mercy of this good mother."[4] Let us then, says St. Bernard, ask the grace we have lost, and let us ask it through Mary.[5] The

[1] Publicum Valetudinarium.

[2] "Etiam diabolo exhiberes misericordiam, si humiliter peteret."—*Rev. extr.* c. 50.

[3] "Quantumcumque homo peccet, si ex vera emendatione ad me reversus fuerit, statim parata sum recipere revertentem; nec attendo quantum peccaverit, sed cum quali voluntate venit; nam non dedignor ejus plagas ungere et sanare, quia vocor (et vere sum) Mater misericordiæ."—*Rev.* l. 2, c. 23; l. 6, c. 117.

[4] "Respirate ad illam perditi peccatores, et perducet vos ad portum."—*Psalt. B V* ps. 18.

[5] Quæramus gratiam, et per Mariam quæramus."—*De Aquæd.*

grace which we have lost, she has found, says Richard of St. Laurence;[1] we therefore ought to go to her in order to recover it. When the Archangel Gabriel announced to the Most Holy Virgin the divine maternity, he said to her: *Fear not, Mary, thou hast found grace.*[2] But, since Mary was never deprived of grace, but was, on the contrary, always full of grace, how could he say that she had found it! In answer to this question, Cardinal Hugo says, that Mary found grace, not for herself, because she had always possessed it, but for us, who have lost it. Hence the same author says, that we ought to go to her and say: O Lady, property ought to be restored to him who has lost it; the grace which thou hast found is not thine, for thou hast always possessed it; it is ours, we have lost it through our own fault; thou shouldst then restore it to us.[3] "Let sinners, then, who have lost grace by their sins, run—let them run to the Virgin, and say with confidence: Restore to us our property, which thou hast found."[4]

Affections and Prayers.

Behold, O great Mother of God! at thy feet a miserable sinner, who has not once, but several times, voluntarily lost the divine grace, which thy Son had purchased for him by his death. O mother of mercy! I come to thee with a soul covered with wounds and sores; be not angry with me on that account, but have the greater pity on me, and assist me. I do not ask of thee earthly goods; I ask thee to obtain for me the grace of God and the love of thy Son. My mother, pray for me, and never cease to pray for me. It is through the merits of Jesus

[1] "Cupientes invenire gratiam, quæramus Inventricem gratiæ."—*De Laud. B. M.* l. 2, p. 5.

[2] "Ne timeas, Maria; invenisti enim gratiam."—*Luke*, i. 30.

[3] "Currant igitur peccatores ad Virginem, qui gratiam amiserunt peccando; secure dicant: Redde nobis rem nostram, quam invenisti."—*In Luc.* 1.

[4] "Advocata nostra, officium tuum imple."—*In Nat. B. V.* conc. 3.

Christ and thy intercession that I am to be saved. Thy office is to intercede for sinners: I will then say, with St. Thomas of Villanova: "O our advocate, fulfil thy office!" recommend me to God and defend me. No cause, however desperate, is lost, when defended by thee. Thou, after Jesus, art the hope of sinners; thou art my hope. O Mary! I will not cease to serve thee, to love thee, and to have recourse to thee always. Do not then ever cease to pray for me, particularly when thou seest me in danger of again losing the grace of God. O Mary, O great mother of God, have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

Charity of Mary.

Let us consider, in the third place, that Mary is so merciful an advocate, that she not only assists all who have recourse to her, but also goes in search of the miserable, in order to defend and save them. Behold how she invites us all, and encourages us to hope for every good, if we have recourse to her. *In me is all hope of life and virtue. Come over to me all.*[1] In explaining this passage, the devout Pelbart says: "She invites all, the just and sinners."[2] The devil, according to St. Peter, goes about continually seeking whom he may devour.[3] But this divine mother, says Bernard da Bustis, goes about seeking whom she may save.[4] Mary is called the mother of mercy; because, like a mother, she cannot see her children in danger of being lost without giving them assistance. Mary pities all our miseries, and constantly seeks our salvation. And, says St. Germanus, who, after Jesus, has greater care of our salvation, than thou, O

[1] "In me omnis spes vitæ et virtutis; transite ad me omnes."—*Eccles.* xxiv. 25.

[2] Omnes, justos et peccatores, invitat.

[3] "Circuit, quærens quem devoret."—1 *Peter*, v. 8.

[4] "Ipsa semper circuit, quærens quem salvet."—*Marial.* p. 3, s. 1.

mother of mercy?[1] St. Bonaventure says that Mary is so solicitous about the relief of the miserable, that she appears to desire nothing with greater ardor than to comfort them.[2]

She certainly assists us as often as we have recourse to her; no one has ever been rejected by her, says the Idiot.[3] But this, adds Richard of St. Victor, is not enough for her; she anticipates our supplications, and obtains aid for us before we ask her prayers.[4] Moreover, the same author says, that Mary is so full of mercy, that, as soon as she sees misery, she instantly obtains relief, and cannot behold any one in distress without coming to his assistance.[5] It was thus she acted when she lived on this earth, as we learn from what happened at the marriage of Cana in Galilee; where, when the wine failed, she did not wait to be asked, but taking pity on the affliction and shame of the spouses, asked her Son to console them, saying: *They have no wine.*[6] Thus she induced him to change, by miracle, water into wine. But, says St. Bonaventure, if Mary's compassion for the afflicted was so great while she was in this world, her pity for us is certainly much greater now that she is in heaven, where she has a better knowledge of our miseries, and greater compassion for us.[7] Novarino adds: If

[1] "Quis post tuum Filium ita generis humani curam gerit sicut tu?"—*De zona Deip.*

[2] "Undique sollicita de miseris. Solum misereri tu videris appetere."—*Stim. am.* p. 3, c. 19.

[3] "Tanta est ejus benignitas, ut nemo ab ea repellatur."—*De cont. B. V. prol.*

[4] "Velocius occurrit ejus pietas, quam invocetur, et causas miserorum anticipat."—*In Cant.* c. 23.

[5] A Deo pietate replentur ubera tua, ut alicujus miseriæ notitia tacta, lac fundant misericordiæ, nec possis miserias scire et non subvenire.

[6] Vinum non habent.

[7] Magna erga miseros fuit misericordia Mariæ adhuc exsultantis in mundo, sed multo major est regnantis in cœlo.

Mary, unasked, shows such readiness to afford relief, how much more careful will she be to console those who ask her prayers![1]

Ah! let us never cease to have recourse in all our necessities to the divine mother, who is always ready to obtain relief for all who pray to her. "You will find her ever ready to assist,"[2] says Richard of St. Laurence. And Bernardine da Bustis adds, that she desires more ardently to obtain graces for us, than we do to receive them.[3] Hence he says that, whenever we have recourse to her, we shall always find her hands full of graces and mercies.[4] According to St. Bonaventure, Mary's desire for our welfare and salvation is so great, that she feels offended not only with those who do her a positive injury, but also with those who neglect to ask favors from her.[5] And, on the other hand, the saint affirms that they who invoke Mary's intercession (that is, with a determination to amend their lives) are saved. Hence he calls her the salvation of those who invoke her.[6] Let us, then, always have recourse to the divine mother, and always say to her with the holy Doctor: "In thee, O Lady, have I hoped; may I not be confounded forever."[7] No, O Lady, O mother of God, O Mary! I shall not be lost after having placed my hopes in thee after Jesus.

[1] "Si tam prompta ad auxilium currit non quæsita, quid requisita præstitura est!"—*Umbra virg.* exc. 72.

[2] "Invenies semper paratam auxiliari."—*De Laud. B. M.* l. 2, p. 1.

[3] Plus desiderat ipsa facere tibi bonum et largiri gratiam, quam tu accipere concupiscas.

[4] "Invenies eam in manibus plenam misericordia et largitate."—*Marial.* p. 2, s. 5.

[5] In te, Domina, peccant, non solum qui tibi injuriam irrogant, sed etiam qui te non rogant.

[6] O salus te invocantium!

[7] In te, Domina, speravi; non confundar in æternum.

Affections and Prayers.

O Mary! behold at thy feet a miserable slave of hell, who implores thy mercy. I, indeed, deserve no good; but thou art the mother of mercy, and mercy is exercised in favor of those who are unworthy of it. The whole world calls thee the refuge and the hope of sinners; then thou art my refuge and my hope. I am a lost sheep; but to save the lost sheep, the Eternal Word came down from heaven, and became thy Son; he wishes that I have recourse to thee, and that thou assist me by thy prayers. *Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, sinners.* O great Mother of God thou prayest for all; pray to thy Son also for me: tell him that I am thy client, and that thou art my protectress: tell him that in thee, after him, I have placed all my hopes; tell him to pardon me, that I repent of all the insults I have offered to him; tell him to grant me in his mercy holy perseverance: tell him to grant me the grace to love him with my whole heart. In fine, tell him to save me. He does whatsoever thou askest. O Mary, my hope! in thee I trust; have pity on me.

CONSIDERATION XXXIII.

The Love of God.

"Let us therefore love God, because God hath first loved us."—1 *John*, iv. 19.

FIRST POINT.

Love and Goodness shown by God to Man.

CONSIDER, in the first place, that God deserves your love, because he has loved you before you loved him, and because he has been the first of all to love you. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*[1] Your parents have been the first to love you on this earth; but they have loved you only after they have known you. Before your father or your mother came into this world, God loved you: even before the world was created, he loved you. And how long before the creation of the world did God love you? Perhaps a thousand years, or a thousand ages? It is useless to count years or ages; God has loved you from eternity. *I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.*[2] In a word, as long as he has been God, he has loved you; as long as he has loved himself, he has loved you. Hence the holy virgin St. Agnes had reason to say: "I am prevented by another lover."[3] When the world and creatures sought her love, she answered: No, I cannot love you. My God

[1] "In charitate perpetua dilexi te."—*Jer.* xxxi. 3.

[2] "In charitate perpetua dilexi te; ideo attraxi te, miserans."—*Jer.* xxxi. 3.

[3] Ab alio amatore prævenia sum.

has been the first to love me; it is but just, then, that I should consecrate all my love to him alone.

Thus, my brother, God has loved you from eternity and through pure love has taken you from among so many men whom he could create; he has given you existence, and has placed you in the world. For the love of you, God has created so many other beautiful creatures, that they might serve you, and remind you of the love which he has borne to you, and of the love which you owe to him. "Heaven and earth," says St. Augustine, "tell me to love Thee."[1] When the saint looked at the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the rivers, they appeared to him to speak, and say: "Augustine, love your God; for he has created us for you, that you might love him." The Abbot de Rancé, founder of La Trappe, when he saw a hill, a fountain, or a flower, would say that all these creatures upbraided him with ingratitude to God. In holding a flower or a fruit in her hand, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi felt her heart wounded as it were by a dart of divine love, and would say within herself: "Then, my God has from eternity thought of creating this flower or fruit, that I might love him."

Consider, moreover, the special love God has shown to you in allowing you to be born in a Christian country, and in the bosom of the true Church. How many are born among idolaters, Jews, Mohammedans, or heretics, and are all lost! The number of those who have the happiness of being born in a country where the true faith prevails, is small, compared with the rest of mankind; and he has chosen you to be one of that small number. Oh, what an infinite gift is the gift of faith! How many millions are deprived of the sacraments, of sermons, of the examples of good companions, and of all the other helps to salvation which are found in the true Church!

[1] "Cœlum et terra et omnia mihi dicunt ut te amem."—*Conf.* l. 10, c. 6.

And God is resolved to give all these great helps to you without any merit on your part, and even with a foreknowledge of your demerits; for when he thought of creating you, and bestowing these graces upon you, he foresaw the insults which you would offer to him.

Affections and Prayers.

O sqvereign Lord of heaven and earth, infinite good, infinite majesty! who hast loved men so tenderly, how does it happen that Thou art so much despised by them? But among these men, Thou, O my God! hast loved me in a particular manner, and hast bestowed on me special graces, which Thou hast not given to so many others. And I have despised Thee more than others. I prostrate myself at Thy feet; O Jesus, my Saviour! "cast me not away from Thy face."[1] I would deserve to be cast off on account of my frequent ingratitude to Thee. But Thou hast said that Thou wilt not reject a penitent soul that returns to Thee. *Him that cometh to Me, I will not cast out.*[2] My Jesus, I am sorry for having offended Thee. Hitherto I have not known Thee. I now acknowledge Thee for my Lord and Redeemer, who hast died in order to save me and to be loved by me. When, O my Jesus! shall I cease to be ungrateful to Thee? When shall I begin truly to love Thee with a true love? Behold, I this day resolve to love Thee with my whole heart, and to love nothing but Thee. O infinite Goodness! I adore Thee for all those who do not adore Thee, and I love Thee for all who do not love Thee. I believe in Thee, I hope in Thee, I love Thee, and offer my whole being to Thee. Assist me by Thy grace; Thou knowest my weakness. But if Thou didst bestow so many graces upon me when I neither loved nor desired to love Thee, how much greater graces should I hope for from Thy mercy now that I love Thee and desire only to love Thee! My Lord, give me Thy love, but a fervent love which will make me forget all creatures; a strong love, which will make me conquer all difficulties in order to please Thee; a perpetual love, which will never be dissolved between me and Thee. I hope

[1] "Ne projicias me a facie tua."—*Ps.* l. 13.

[2] "Eum qui venit ad me, non ejiciam foras."—*John*, vi. 37.

for all graces through Thy merits, O my Jesus! and I hope for them through thy intercession, O my mother, Mary.

SECOND POINT.

God has given Himself to us.

But God has not only given us so many beautiful creatures—he was not content until he even gave us himself. He loved us, and delivered himself up for us.[1] Accursed sin had robbed us of the divine grace, and made us the slaves of hell; but, to the astonishment of heaven and of all nature, the Son of God came on earth to become man in order to redeem us from eternal death, and to purchase for us the grace and the eternal glory which we had lost. How great would be our wonder if we saw a monarch become a worm for the love of worms! But our astonishment would be infinitely greater at the sight of a God made man for the love of men. *He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, . . . and in habit found as man.*[2] A God clothed in flesh! *And the word was made flesh.*[3] But the astonishment increases when we see all that this Son of God has done and suffered for the love of us. To redeem us it would have been sufficient for him to shed a single drop of his blood, or a single tear, or to offer a single prayer; for a prayer offered by a divine person would be of infinite value, and therefore sufficient for the salvation of the whole world, and of an infinite number of worlds. But, says St. Chrysostom, what was sufficient for redemption was not sufficient for the immense love which this God bore to us.[4] He not only wished to save us, but, because he loved us ardently, he wished to be loved ardently by us; and therefore he resolved to lead

[1] "Dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis."—*Eph.* v. 2.

[2] "Semetipsum exinanivit, formam servi accipiens . . . et habitu inventus ut homo."—*Phil.* ii. 7.

[3] "Et verbum caro factum est."—*John*, i. 14.

[4] Quod sufficiebat redemptioni, non sufficiebat amori.

a life full of sorrows and humiliations, and to suffer a death the most painful of all deaths, in order to make us understand the infinite love which he entertained for us. *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.*[1] O excess of divine love, which all men and all angels will never be able to comprehend! I say, *excess;* for Moses and Elias, speaking of the Passion of Jesus Christ, called it an excess.[2] St. Bonaventure called the Passion of Christ an "excess of sorrow and of love."[3] If our Redeemer had not been God, but a friend or a relative, what greater proof of love could he have given, than to die for us? *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*[4] If Jesus Christ had to save his own Father, he could not have done more for the love of him! If, my brother, you had been God and the creator of Jesus Christ, what more could he have done for you than sacrifice his life in the midst of a sea of torments and sorrows, for the love of you? If the most contemptible man on earth had done for you what Jesus Christ has done for you, could you live without loving him?

But what do you say? Do you believe in the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ? You believe these mysteries; and do you not love him? or, can you think of loving anything but Jesus Christ! He, says St. Augustine, has come on earth to suffer and to die for you in order to make known to you the immense love which he bears you.[5] Before the Incarnation, man might doubt

[1] "Humiliavit semetipsum factus est obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis."—*Phil.* ii. 8.

[2] "Dicebant excessum ejus, quem completurus erat in Jerusalem."—*Luke*, ix. 31.

[3] Excessus doloris, excessus amoris.

[4] "Majorem hac dilectionem nemo habet, ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis."—*John*, xv. 13.

[5] "Propterea Christus advenit, ut cognosceret homo quantum eum diligat Deus."—*De catech. rud.* c. 4.

whether God loved him tenderly; but how, after the Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, can he any longer doubt that God loves him with the most tender love? And what greater tenderness of affection could he show you, than to sacrifice his divine life for the love of you? Our ears are accustomed to hear of creation, of redemption, of a God in a manger, of a God on a cross. O holy faith, enlighten us!

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus! I see that Thou couldst have done nothing more in order to compel me to love Thee; and I also see that by my ingratitude I have labored to force Thee to abandon me. Blessed forever be Thy patience, which has borne with me so long. I would deserve a hell made on purpose for myself; but Thy death gives me confidence. Ah! make me understand well the claims which Thou, O infinite Good! hast to my love, and the obligations by which I am bound to love Thee. I knew, O my Jesus! that Thou didst die for me; how then, O God! have I been able to live for so many years in forgetfulness of Thee? Oh that the past years of my life commenced again! I would wish, O my Lord! to give them all to Thee. But years do not return. Ah! grant that I may at least spend all the remaining days of my life in loving and pleasing Thee. My dear Redeemer! I love Thee with my whole heart; but increase this love within me. Remind me always of all that Thou hast done for me; and do not permit me to be any longer ungrateful to Thee. No; I will no longer resist the lights Thou hast given me. Thou didst wish to be loved by me, and I desire to love Thee. And whom will I love, if I do not love a God of infinite beauty and infinite goodness? a God who has died for me? a God who has borne with me with so much patience, and who, instead of chastising me as I deserved, has changed chastisements into graces and favors? Yes; I love Thee, O God! worthy of infinite love, and I sigh and seek to live wholly employed in loving Thee, and forgetful of everything but Thee. O infinite charity of my Lord! assist a soul that ardently desires to be entirely Thine O great mother of God, Mary, do thou too assist me by thy intercession; beg of Jesus to make me belong entirely to him.

THIRD POINT.

Love that Jesus Christ has shown in His Passion.

Our astonishment increases when we consider the ardor with which Jesus Christ desired to suffer and die for the love of us. *I have a baptism*, says Jesus Christ, *wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.*[1] I am to be baptized with the baptism of my own blood: and I feel myself dying through a desire that my Passion and death may soon come, that thus man may soon know the love which I bear to him. It was this desire that made him say on the night before his Passion: *With desire have I desired to eat this pasch with you before I suffer.*[2] Then, says St. Basil of Seleucia, it appears that our God cannot be satiated with loving men.[3]

Ah, my Jesus! men do not love Thee because they do not think of the love which Thou hast had for them. O God! how is it possible for a soul to live without loving God, if it considers that he died for its sake, and that he died with so great a desire of showing his love for it? *The charity of Christ presseth us.*[4] St. Paul says that it is not so much what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our salvation, as the love which he has displayed in suffering for us, that obliges, and, as it were, forces us to love him. Contemplating the love which Jesus Christ exhibits in his Passion, St. Laurence Justinian exclaimed: "We behold the All-wise infatuated through excess of

[1] "Baptismo autem habeo baptizari; et quomodo coarctor usquedum perficiatur!"—*Luke*, xii. 50.

[2] "Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum."—*Luke*, xxii. 15.

[3] Hominum amore nequit expleri Deus.

[4] "Charitas enim Christi urget nos."—2 *Cor.* v. 14.

love."[1] We have seen a God as it were foolish, through the excess of his love for us. And who could ever believe, had not faith assured us of it, that the Creator would die for his own creatures? In an ecstasy, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, carrying a crucifix in her hands, exclaimed: "Yes, my Jesus, Thou art foolish through love." This the Gentiles also said when they heard the apostles preaching the death of Jesus Christ; they, as St. Paul attests, regarded it as a folly which could not be believed. *We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness.*[2] And how, said they, could a God that is most happy in himself, and stands not in need of any one, descend on earth, to become man, and die for the love of men, who are his creatures? This would be the same as to believe that a God had become foolish for the sake of men. But, it is of faith that Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, has delivered himself to death for the love of us. *Christ hath loved us, and hath delivered Himself for us.*[3]

And why has he done so? He has done so that we might no longer live to the world, but only to that Lord who has died for us. *Christ died for all, that they also who live may not live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them.*[4] He has done it that, by the love which he has shown us, he might win all the affections of our hearts. *For to this end Christ died and rose again, that He might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living.*[5] Hence the saints, contemplating the death of Jesus Christ, thought it very little

[1] "Vidimus sapientiam amoris nimietate infatuatam."—*Serm. de Nativ.*

[2] "Prædicamus Christum crucifixum, Judæis quidem scandalum, Gentibus autem stultitiam."—*1 Cor.* i. 23.

[3] "Dilexit nos, et tradidit semetipsum pro nobis."—*Eph.* v. 2.

[4] "Pro omnibus mortuus est Christus, ut et qui vivunt, jam non sibi vivant, sed ei qui pro ipsis mortuus est."—*2 Cor.* v. 15.

[5] "In hoc enim Christus mortuus est et resurrexit, ut et mortuorum et vivorum dominetur."—*Rom.* xiv. 9.

to give their life and all things for the love of so loving a God. How many noblemen, how many princes, have left relatives, riches, country, and even kingdoms, to shut themselves up in a cloister, in order to live only to the love of Jesus Christ! How many martyrs have sacrificed their life! how many tender virgins, renouncing the nuptials of the great, have gone with joy to death, in order thus to make some return for the affection of a God who had died for their sake! And, my brother, what have you hitherto done for the sake of Jesus Christ? As he has died for the saints—for St. Laurence, for St. Lucy, for St. Agnes, so he has also died for you. What do you intend to do during the remaining days of life, which God gives you that you may love him? From this day forward, look frequently at the crucifix, and, in looking at it, call to mind the love which Jesus Christ has borne you, and say within yourself: Thou hast then, my God, died for me? Do this at least, I say, and do it often; if you do, you cannot but feel yourself sweetly constrained to love a God who has loved you so tenderly.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my dear Redeemer! it is true that I have not loved Thee because I have not reflected on the love which Thou hast borne me! Ah, my Jesus! I have been very ungrateful to Thee! Thou hast given Thy life for me by submitting to the most painful of all deaths; and have I been so ungrateful as not even to think of Thy sufferings? Pardon me; I promise, O my crucified Love! that from this day forward Thou shalt be the only object of my thoughts and of all my affections! Ah! when the devil or the world presents me a forbidden apple, remind me, O my beloved Saviour! of the pains which Thou hast endured for my sake, that I may love Thee, and may never more offend Thee! Ah! if one of my servants had done for me what Thou hast done, I could not bring myself to displease him. And I have dared to turn my back so often on Thee, who hast died for me. O beautiful flames, which have obliged a God to give his

life for me, come, inflame, fill my whole heart, and destroy all affections to created things. Ah, my beloved Redeemer! how is it possible for me to contemplate Thee, either in the manger, in Bethlehem, on the cross on Calvary, or in the sacrament on our altars, and not be enamored of Thee? My Jesus! I love Thee with my whole soul. During the remaining years of my life Thou shalt be my only good, my only love. I have unhappily lived long enough forgetful of Thy Passion and of Thy love. I give Thee all things, and if I do not give myself to Thee as I ought, take me, and reign in my whole heart. *Thy kingdom come.* May my heart be the servant only of Thy love. May I speak of nothing else, may I treat of nothing else, may I think of nothing else, may I sigh and desire only to love and please Thee. Assist me always by Thy grace, that I may be faithful to Thee. In Thy merits I trust, O my Jesus! O mother of fair love! make me ardently love thy Son, who is so amiable, and who has loved me so tenderly.

CONSIDERATION XXXIV.

Holy Communion.

"Take ye, and eat: this is my body."—*Matt.* xxvi. 26.

FIRST POINT.

The Eucharist is a Precious Gift.

LET us consider the great gift which Jesus Christ has bestowed on us in the institution of the Most Holy Sacrament; the great love he has shown to us in this gift; and his great desire that we should receive this gift. Let us, in the first place, consider the great gift which Jesus Christ has bestowed upon us in giving us himself entirely for our food in the Holy Communion. St. Augustine says that Jesus Christ, though an omnipotent God, has nothing more to give us.[1] And what greater treasure, adds St. Bernardine of Sienna, can a soul receive or desire, than the sacred body of Jesus Christ?[2] The prophet Isaias exclaims: *Make His works known among the people.*[3] O men! proclaim aloud the loving inventions of our good God. And if our Redeemer had not bestowed this gift upon us, who among us could have asked it? Who could have dared to say to him: Lord, if Thou wishest to make us understand Thy love, remain under the species of bread, and permit us

[1] "Cum esset omnipotens, plus dare non potuit."—*Lohner Bibli.* tit. 52, §. 3.

[2] "Quis melior thesaurus in corde hominis esse potest, quam corpus Christi?"—T. iv. s. 12, a. 1, c. 4.

[3] "Notas facite adinventiones ejus."—*Isa.* xii. 4.

to make Thee our food? Even to think of it would be considered folly. "Does it not," says St. Augustine, "appear foolishness to say, eat my flesh—drink my blood?"[1] When Jesus Christ made known to his disciples this great gift of the Most Holy Sacrament which he wished to leave us, they could not bring themselves to believe it; and, therefore, they departed from him, saying: *How can this man give us his flesh to eat? . . . This saying is hard, and who can hear it?*[2] But, what men could never imagine, the great love of Jesus Christ has invented and executed.

St. Bernardine says that the Lord has left us this sacrament as a memorial of the love he has shown us in his Passion.[3] And this accords with what Jesus Christ himself has said: *Do this for a commemoration of Me.*[4] The love of our Saviour, adds St. Bernardine, was not content with sacrificing his life for our salvation: before his death this love constrained him to bequeath to us the greatest gift which he had ever bestowed upon us, by giving us himself for our food.[5] The Abbot Guerric says that, in this sacrament, Jesus made the last effort of love.[6] This was better expressed by the Council of Trent, which declared that, in the Eucharist, Jesus poured out all the riches of his love for men.[7]

How great, says St. Francis de Sales, the tenderness of love which a prince would show to a beggar by send-

[1] "Nonne videtur insania: Manducate meam carnem, bibite meum sanguinem?"—*In Ps.* xxxiii. en. 1.

[2] "Durus est hic sermo, et quis potest eum audire?"—*John.* vi. 61.

[3] Hoc sacramentum est memoriale suæ dilectionis.

[4] "Hoc facite in meam commemorationem."—*Luke.* xxii. 19.

[5] "In illo fervoris excessu, quando paratus erat pro nobis mori, ab excessu amoris majus opus agere coactus est, quam unquam operatus fuit: dare nobis corpus in cibum."—T. II. s. 54, a. 1, c. 1.

[6] "Omnem vim amoris effudit amicis."—*Serm. de Ascen. Dom.*

[7] "Divitias divini sui erga homines amoris velut effudit."—Sess. 13, c. 2.

ing him a part of what he had on his own plate! How much greater would it be if he sent him the entire of his own dinner! But what would it be, if he sent him, for his food, a part of his own arm! In Holy Communion, Jesus gives us not only a portion of his own dinner, not only a part, but the entire of his body. *Take ye, and eat: this is My body.*[1] And with his body he gives us his soul and his divinity. In a word, St. Chrysostom says that, in giving you himself in Holy Communion, he gives you all that he has, and reserves nothing for himself.[2] And the angelic Doctor says that, "in the Eucharist, God has given us all that he is and has."[3] Behold! exclaims St. Bonaventure, that God whom the world cannot contain makes himself our prisoner in the Most Holy Sacrament.[4] And since the Lord gives himself entirely to us in the Eucharist, how can we fear that he will refuse us any grace which we ask of him? *How*, says St. Paul, *hath He not also, with Him, given us all things.*[5]

Affections and Prayers.

O my Jesus! what has induced Thee to give Thyself entirely to us for our food? After this gift, what more remains for Thee to give us in order to oblige us to love Thee? Ah, Lord! give us light, make us understand the excess of Thy love in becoming food in order to unite Thyself to poor sinners! But, if Thou givest Thyself entirely to us, it is just that we too give our whole being to Thee. O my Redeemer! how have I been able to offend Thee, who hast loved me so tenderly, and who hast done so much to gain my love? Thou hast become man for my sake, Thou hast died for me, Thou hast become my food; tell

[1] "Accipite et comedite; hoc est corpus meum."—*Matt.* xxvi. 26.

[2] Totum tibi dedit, nihil sibi reliquit.

[3] "Deus in Eucharistia totum quod ipse est et habet in summo dedit."—*De Beat.* c. 3.

[4] "Ecce, quem mundus capere non potest, captivus noster est."—*Exp. Miss.* c. 4.

[5] "Quomodo non etiam cum illo omnia nobis donavit?"—*Rom.* viii. 32.

me, what more couldst Thou have done? I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O infinite Love! Lord, come often to my soul; inflame my whole heart with Thy holy love; grant that I may forget all things in order to think only of Thee, and to love nothing but Thee. Most Holy Mary, pray for me, and, by thy intercession, make me worthy to receive thy Son frequently in the Holy Sacrament.

SECOND POINT.

The Eucharist is a Gift of Love.

Let us consider, in the second place, the great love which Jesus Christ has shown us in giving us himself in the Holy Eucharist. The Most Holy Sacrament is a gift which has proceeded from pure love. For our salvation it was necessary, according to the decree of God, that the Redeemer should die, and, by the sacrifice of his life, satisfy the divine justice for our sins; but what necessity was there that Jesus Christ, after having died for our redemption, should leave himself to us for our food? But this his love wished to do. He, says St. Laurence Justinian, instituted the Eucharist for no other purpose than to show his great charity, for no other purpose than to make us understand the immense love which he bears us.[1] This is precisely what St. John has written: *Jesus, knowing that His hour was come that He should pass out of this world to the Father: having loved His own, He loved them to the end.*[2] Knowing that the time of his departure from this earth had arrived, he wished to give us the greatest proof of his love, by bequeathing to us this gift of the Most Holy Sacrament. This is the precise meaning of the words, *He loved them to the end;* that is, according to Theophilactus and St. Chrysostom, "he loved them with an extreme love."[3]

[1] "Hoc ardentissimæ charitatis indicium."—*De Tr. Chr. Ag.* c. 2.

[2] "Sciens Jesus quia venit hora ejus, ut transeat ex hoc mundo ad Patrem, cum dilexisset suos, . . . in finem dilexit eos."—*John*, xiii. 1.

[3] Extremo amore, summe dilexit eos.

And mark what the apostle has observed—that the time at which Jesus Christ wished to bequeath this gift was the time of his death. *The Lord Jesus, the same night on which He was betrayed, took bread, and, giving thanks, broke, and said, "Take ye, and eat: this is My body."* [1] At the very time that men prepared for him scourges, thorns, and a cross to crucify him, the loving Saviour wished to leave us this the last proof of his love. And why at death, and not before that time, did he institute this sacrament? Because, says St. Bernardine, the marks of love given by friends at death make a greater impression on the memory, and are preserved with greater affection.[2] Jesus Christ, says the saint, had already given himself to us in many ways: he had given himself to us for a companion, a master, a father; for our light and our victim. The last degree of love remained; and this was, to give himself to us for our food in order to unite himself entirely to us, as food is united with him who eats it.[3] This he has done by giving himself to us in the Most Holy Sacrament. Thus, our Redeemer was not content with uniting himself only to our human nature: he wished by this sacrament to find a means of also uniting himself to each of us in particular.

St. Francis de Sales says "that in no other action can the Saviour be considered more tender or more loving than in the institution of the Holy Eucharist; in which he, as it were, annihilates himself, and becomes food, in order to penetrate our souls, and to unite himself to the hearts of his faithful servants." Thus, says St. Chrysos-

[1] "In qua nocte tradebatur, accepit panem, et gratias agens fregit, et dixit: Accipite et manducate: hoc est corpus meum."—1 *Cor.* xi. 23.

[2] Quæ in fine in signum amicitiæ celebrantur, firmius memoriæ imprimuntur et chariora tenentur.

[3] "Ultimus gradus amoris est, cum se dedit nobis in cibum; quia dedit se nobis ad omnimodam unionem, sicut cibus et cibans invicem uniuntur."—T. II. s. 54, a. 1, c. 1; a. 4, c. 1.

tom, with that Lord on whom the angels dare not fix their eyes, we are united, and are made one body and one flesh.[1] What shepherd, adds the saint, has ever fed his sheep with his own blood? Even mothers intrust their children to the care of nurses. But Jesus, in the sacrament, nourishes us with his own blood, and unites us to himself.[2] And why become our food? Because, says the saint, he loved us ardently, and by making himself our food, he wished to unite himself entirely to us, and to make himself one thing with us.[3] Then Jesus Christ wished to perform the greatest of his miracles (*He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works; He hath given food to them that fear Him*[4]) in order to satisfy his desire of remaining with us, and of uniting in one, our heart and his own most holy heart. "O wonderful is Thy love, O Lord Jesus!" exclaims St. Laurence Justinian, "who wished to incorporate us in such a manner with Thyself, that we should have one heart and one soul inseparably united with Thee."[5]

That great servant of God, Father De la Colombière, used to say: If anything could shake my faith in the mystery of the Eucharist, I would not doubt of the power, but rather of the love, which God displays in this sacrament. If you ask me how bread becomes the body of Jesus—how Jesus is found in many places, I answer that God can do all things. But if you ask me how it is that

[1] Huic nos unimur, et facti sumus unum corpus et una caro.

[2] "Quis pastor oves proprio pascit cruore? Et quid dico, pastor? Matres multæ sunt, quæ filios aliis tradunt nutricibus; hoc autem ipse non est passus, sed nos proprio sanguine pascit."—*Ad pop. Ant. hom.* 60.

[3] "Semetipsum nobis immiscuit, ut unum quid simus; ardenter enim amantium hoc est."—*Ad pop. Ant. hom.* 61.

[4] "Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum misericors et miserator Dominus, escam dedit timentibus se."—*Ps.* cx. 4.

[5] "O quam mirabilis est dilectio tua, Domine Jesu, qui tuo corpori taliter nos incorporari voluisti, ut tecum unum cor et animam haberemus inseparabiliter colligatam."—*De Inc. div. am.* c. 5.

God loves men so as to make himself their food, I can only say that I do not understand it, and that the love of Jesus cannot be comprehended. But, O Lord! to reduce Thyself to the condition of food, appears to be an excess of love not suited to Thy majesty. But St. Bernard's answer is, that love makes lovers forget their own dignity.[1] St. Chrysostom also answers that love seeks not what is convenient when there is question of making itself known to the beloved; it goes not where it ought, but where it is carried by the ardor of its desire.[2] Justly, then, has the angelic Doctor called this sacrament "a sacrament of love—a pledge of love."[3] And St. Bernard calls it *love of loves.* St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to call Holy Thursday, the day on which this sacrament was instituted, *the day of love.*

Affections and Prayers.

O infinite love of Jesus, worthy of infinite love! Ah! my Jesus, when shall I love Thee as Thou hast loved me? Thou couldst do nothing more to make me love Thee; and I have forsaken Thee, O infinite Good! for the sake of vile and miserable goods! Ah! enlighten me, O my God! discover to me always more and more the greatness of Thy goodness, that my whole soul may be enamoured of Thee, and that I may labor to please Thee. I love Thee, O my Jesus! my love, my all; and I wish to unite myself frequently to Thee in this sacrament, in order to detach myself from all things, and to love Thee alone, who art my life. Through the merits of Thy Passion, assist me, O my Redeemer! O Mother of Jesus, and my Mother! do thou, too, assist me; beg of him to inflame my whole heart with his holy love.

[1] "Amor dignitatis nescius."—*In Cant.* s. 64.

[2] "Amor ratione caret, et vadit quo ducitur, non quo debeat."—*Serm.* 147.

[3] Sacramentum charitatis, charitatis pignus.

THIRD POINT.

How much Jesus Christ desires to Unite Himself to us.

Let us, in the third place, consider the great ardor with which Jesus Christ desires that we should receive him in Holy Communion. *Jesus knowing that His hour was come.*[1] But how could Jesus call the night on which his bitter Passion should commence, *His hour?* He calls it *His hour*, because on that night he was to institute this divine sacrament in order to unite himself entirely to his beloved souls. This desire made him say: *With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you.*[2] Words by which the Redeemer wished to show us the great ardor with which he desired to unite himself to each of us in this sacrament. *With desire I have desired.* Words which, according to St. Laurence Justinian, proceeded from his immense love for us. This is the language of the most burning love.[3] The Redeemer wished to give himself to us under the appearance of bread, that all might be able to receive him. Had he given himself to us under the appearance of costly food, the poor would not be able to receive him, and had he instituted the Holy Sacrament under the appearance of any other cheap food, this perhaps would not be found in all parts of the world. Jesus wished to leave himself under the species of bread, because it costs but little, and is found in every country; so that all persons in all places may find him and receive him.

Through his great desire that we should receive him, the Redeemer not only presses us to receive him by so many invitations: *Come, eat My bread, and drink the wine*

[1] "Sciens Jesus quia venit hora ejus."—*John*, xiii. 1.

[2] "Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum."—*Luke*, xxii. 15.

[3] "Flagrantissimæ charitatis est vox hæc."—*De Tr. Chr. Ag.* c. 2.

which I have mingled for you.[1] *Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, My dearly beloved,*[2] but he also commands us to receive him. *Take ye, and eat: this is My body.*[3] Moreover, he endeavors to allure us to the holy table by promises of eternal life. *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath life everlasting. He that eateth this bread shall live forever.*[4] He also threatens to exclude from paradise all who neglect to receive him in the holy sacrament. *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you.*[5] These invitations, promises, and threats all proceed from the ardent desire of Jesus Christ to unite himself to us in this sacrament. And this desire springs from the great love which he bears us: for, as St. Francis de Sales says, the end of love is nothing else than to be united with the object of love. And because in this sacrament Jesus unites himself entirely to the soul—*He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, abideth in Me and I in him.*[6] Therefore he desires so ardently that we should receive him. Our Lord said one day to St. Mechtilde: "The bee does not cast itself on the flower from which it sucks the honey, with as much ardor as I come to the soul that desires to receive me."

Oh! If the faithful understood the great blessing which Holy Communion brings to the soul! Jesus is

[1] "Venite, comedite panem meum, et bibite vinum quod miscui vobis."—*Prov.* ix. 5.

[2] "Comedite, amici, et bibite, et inebriamini, charissimi."—*Cant.* v. 1.

[3] "Accipite et comedite; hoc est corpus meum."—*Matt.* xxvi. 26.

[4] "Qui manducat meam carnem, et bibit meum sanguinem, habet vitam æternam. . . . Qui manducat hunc panem, vivet in æternum."—*John*, vi. 55.

[5] "Nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, et biberitis ejus sanguinem, non habebitis vitam in vobis."—*John*, vi. 54.

[6] "Qui manducat meam carnem, et bibit meum sanguinem, in me manet et ego in illo."—*John*, vi. 57.

the Lord of all riches; for his Father has made him master of all things. *Knowing that the Father had given Him all things into His hands.*[1] Hence, when Jesus Christ comes to a soul in Holy Communion, he brings with him immense treasures of graces. *Now all good things*, says Solomon, speaking of the eternal wisdom, *came to me together with her*[2]

St. Denis says that the Most Holy Sacrament has the greatest efficacy in sanctifying the soul.[3] And St. Vincent Ferrer asserts that the soul derives greater profit from one Communion, than from fasting for a week on bread and water. The Communion, as the Council of Trent teaches, is that great remedy which delivers us from venial, and preserves us from mortal sins.[4] Hence St. Ignatius, martyr, has called the Most Holy Sacrament the medicine of immortality.[5] Innocent III. has said that, by his Passion, Jesus Christ has delivered us from the punishment of sin; but, by the Eucharist, he preserves us from the commission of sin.[6]

Moreover, this sacrament kindles the fire of divine love. *He brought me into the cellar of wine; he set in order charity in me. Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples; because I languish with love.*[7] St. Gregory of Nyssa says that Holy Communion is this cellar of wine, in

[1] "Omnia dedit ei Pater in manus."—*John*, xiii. 3.

[2] "Venerunt autem mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa."—*Wis.* vii. 11.

[3] Eucharistia maximam vim habet perficiendæ sanctitatis.

[4] "Antidotum quo liberemur a culpis quotidianis, et a peccatis mortalibus præservemur."—Sess. 13, cap. 2.

[5] "Pharmacum immortalitatis."—*Ep. ad Eph.* c. 20.

[6] "Per crucis mysterium, eripuit nos a potestate peccati; per Eucharistiæ sacramentum, liberat nos a voluntate peccandi."—*De Alt. Myst.* l. 4, c. 44.

[7] "Introduxit me in cellam vinariam, ordinavit in me charitatem. Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis; quia amore langueo."—*Cant.* ii. 4.

which the soul is so inebriated with divine love, that she forgets the earth and all creatures: it is thus the soul languishes with holy charity. The Venerable Father Francis Olimpio, of the Order of Theatines, used to say that there is nothing that so powerfully inflames the soul with divine love, as Holy Communion. God is love and a fire of love. *God is charity.*[1] *My God is a consuming fire.*[2] And this fire of love the Eternal Word came to light upon the earth. *I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I but that it be kindled?*[2] Oh! what burning flames of holy love does Jesus kindle in the souls who receive him in this sacrament with a desire of being inflamed with his love. St. Catharine of Sienna saw, one day, in the hands of a priest, Jesus, in the Holy Sacrament, like a furnace of love; and wondered that the hearts of all men were not set on fire and reduced to ashes by the flames which issued from the Holy Eucharist. St. Rose of Lima used to say that, in receiving Jesus Christ, she felt as if she received the sun. Hence she sent forth from her countenance rays which dazzled the sight, and the heat emitted from her mouth after Communion was so intense, that the person who reached her a drink felt her hand scorched as if she approached a furnace. In visiting the Most Holy Sacrament, St. Wenceslaus, king and martyr, was inflamed, even externally, with such a degree of heat that the servant who accompanied him, when obliged to walk on the snow, trod in the footsteps of the saint, and thus felt no cold. "The Eucharist," says St. John Chrysostom, "is a fire which inflames us, that, like lions breathing fire, we may retire from the

[1] "Deus charitas est."—1 *John*, iv. 8. "Ignis consumens est."—*Deut.* iv. 24.

[2] "Ignem veni mittere in terram; et quid volo, nisi ut accendatur?—*Luke*, xii. 49.

altar being made terrible to the devil."[1] The Holy Sacrament is a fire which inflames the soul to such a degree, that we ought to depart from the altar breathing such flames of love that the devil will no longer dare to tempt us.

But some will say: I do not communicate often because I am cold in divine love. But, says Gerson, he who acts in this manner is like the man who refuses to approach the fire because he feels cold. The greater, then, our tepidity, the more frequently we ought to receive the Most Holy Sacrament, provided we have a desire to love God. "If," says St. Francis de Sales (in his *Devout Life*, chap. xxi.), "you are asked why you communicate so frequently, say that two sorts of persons ought to communicate often—the perfect and the imperfect: the perfect to preserve perfection, and the imperfect to acquire perfection." St. Bonaventure says: "Though you feel tepid, approach, trusting in the mercy of God. The more a person feels sick, the more he stands in need of a physician."[2] And Jesus Christ says to St. Mechtilde: "When you are to communicate, desire to have all the love which any soul has ever had for me, and I will accept your love in proportion to the ardor with which you wish for it.[3]

Affections and Prayers.

O enamoured of souls, O my Jesus! it is not in Thy power to give us greater proofs of love in order to show us that Thou lovest us. And what more couldst Thou invent to induce us to love Thee? Ah! grant, O infinite Goodness! that I may love

[1] "Carbo est Eucharistia, quæ nos inflammat, ut tamquam leones ignem spirantes ab illa mensa recedamus, facti diabolo terribiles."—*Ad pop. Ant. hom.* 61.

[2] "Licet tepide, tamen confidens de misericordia Dei accedat; tanto magis æger necesse habet requirere medicum, quanto magis senserit se ægrotum."—*De Prof. rel.* l. 2, c. 77.

[3] Spir. grat. l. 3 c. 22.

Thee tenderly and with all my strength! And who is there that has greater claims on the affections of my heart, than Thou, my Redeemer, who, after having given Thy life for my salvation, hast given me Thyself entirely in this sacrament? Ah! Lord, that I always remembered Thy love in order to forget all things, and to love Thee alone without interruption and without reserve! I love Thee, O my Jesus above all things, and I wish to love Thee alone. Banish from my heart, I entreat Thee, all affections which are not for Thee. I thank Thee for giving me time to love Thee and to weep over the offences I have offered to Thee. My Jesus, I desire that Thou mayst be the only object of my affections. Assist me, save me, and let my salvation consist in loving Thee with my whole heart, and in loving Thee always in this life and in the next. Mary, my Mother, obtain for me the grace to love Jesus Christ; pray to him for me.

CONSIDERATION XXXV

Dwelling of Jesus on our Altars.

"Come to me all ye that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you."—*Matt.* xi. 28.

FIRST POINT.

Jesus makes Himself Accessible to Every One.

HAVING to depart from this world after he had completed the work of redemption, our loving Saviour did not wish to leave us alone in this valley of tears. "No tongue," says St. Peter of Alcantara, "can express the greatness of the love which Jesus Christ bears to our souls. Hence, that his absence from us might not be an occasion of forgetting him, this spouse, before his departure from this world, left, as a memorial of his love, this Most Holy Sacrament, in which he himself has remained. He did not wish that between him and his servants there should be any other pledge than himself, to keep alive the remembrance of him." This effort of love on the part of Jesus Christ merits great love from us; and, according to the revelation said to have been made to his servant, Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, he wished that in these latter times a festival should be instituted in honor of his Most Sacred Heart, in order that, by our devotions and affections, we might make some return for his loving dwelling on our altars, and thus compensate the insults which he has received in this sacrament of love, and which he receives every day from heretics and bad Catholics.

Jesus has left himself in the Most Holy Sacrament, first, that all may be able to find him; secondly, to give audience to all; thirdly, to give his graces to all. He, in the first place, remains on so many altars, that all who wish may be able to find him. On the night on which the Redeemer took leave of his disciples to go to his death, they shed tears of sorrow at the thought of being separated from their dear Master; but Jesus consoled them, saying (and the same he then said also to us): My children, I am going to die for you, in order to show you the love which I bear you. But at my death I will not leave you alone: as long as you are on earth, I will remain with you in the Most Holy Sacrament. I leave you my body, my soul, my divinity: I leave myself entirely to you. As long as you remain on earth, I will not depart from you. *Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*[1] The Saviour, says St. Peter of Alcantara, did not wish to leave his spouse alone at such a distance, and therefore he has left this sacrament, in which he himself, the best of all companions, has remained with her. The Gentiles have invented so many gods; but they could never imagine a god more loving than our God, who remains nigh to us, and assists us with so much love. *Neither is there any other nation so great, that hath God so nigh them, as our God is present to all our petitions.*[2] The holy Church applies this passage of Deuteronomy to the festival of the Most Holy Sacrament.—*Resp.* ii. *Noct.* iii.

Behold, then, Jesus Christ remains in our tabernacles, as if confined in so many prisons of love. His priests remove him from the tabernacle to expose him on the altar, or to give Communion, and afterward put him

[1] "Ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus, usque ad consummationem sæculi."—*Matt.* xxviii. 20.

[2] "Non est alia natio tam grandis, quæ habeat deos appropinquantes sibi, sicut Deus noster adest nobis."—*Deut.* iv. 7.

back to be again shut up: and Jesus is content to remain there day and night. But why, my Redeemer, dost thou remain in so many churches, even during the night, when the faithful lock the doors, and leave Thee alone? It would be enough for Thee to remain during the day. No; he wished to remain also during the night, though left alone, that, in the morning, all who seek may instantly find him. The sacred spouse went in search of her beloved, saying to every one she met: *Have you seen him whom my soul loveth?*[1] And, not finding him, she raised her voice and exclaimed: My spouse, tell me where thou art. *Show me . . . where thou feedest, where thou liest in the mid-day.*[2] The spouse did not find him, because then the Most Holy Sacrament was not instituted; but, at present, if a soul wishes to find Jesus Christ, it has only to go to a church in which the Holy Eucharist is preserved, and there it will find its beloved expecting it. There is not a town nor a convent in which the Holy Sacrament is not kept; and in all these places the King of Heaven is content to remain shut up in a case of wood or of stone, often almost without a lamp burning before him, and without any one to keep him company. But, "O Lord!" says St. Bernard, "this is not suited to Thy Majesty." "No matter," Jesus replies; "if it becomes not my Majesty, it well becomes my love."

What tender devotion do pilgrims feel in visiting the holy house of Loretto—the Holy Land—the stable at Bethlehem—the hill of Calvary—or the holy sepulchre, in which Jesus Christ was born, or lived, or died, or was buried! But how much greater tenderness should we feel in a church, in presence of Jesus himself in the Blessed Sacrament? The venerable Father John D'Avila used to say that he knew no sanctuary capable of

[1] "Num, quem diligit anima mea, vidistis?"—*Cant.* iii. 3.

[2] "Indica mihi . . . ubi pascas, ubi cubes in meridie."—*Cant.* i. 6.

inspiring greater devotion or consolation than a church in which Jesus remains in the Holy Eucharist. Father Balthazar Alvarez would weep in seeing the palaces of princes filled with courtiers, and the churches, in which Jesus Christ dwells, solitary and abandoned. O God! if the Lord remained only in one church—for example, in St. Peter's in Rome—and only on one day in the year, oh! how many pilgrims, how many nobles, how many princes would endeavor to have the happiness of being there on that day, to pay court and homage to the King of Heaven descended again upon the earth! Oh, what a splendid tabernacle of gold, adorned with gems, would be prepared for the occasion! Oh, with what an abundance of lights would the dwelling of Jesus Christ on the earth be celebrated on that day! But, says the Redeemer, I do not wish to remain only in a single church, or but for a single day: nor require either such riches, or such a profusion of lights. I wish to remain continually every day, and in all places in which my servants are found; that all may easily find me at all times, and at any hour they wish.

Ah! if Jesus Christ had not invented this excess of love, who could have ever thought of it? Should a Christian, after the ascension of the Redeemer into heaven, say to him, Lord, if Thou wishest to show us Thy affection, remain with us on our altars under the appearance of bread, that we may be able to find Thee whenever we wish: would not such a demand be regarded as the extreme of temerity? But, what no man could ever even imagine, our Saviour has invented and accomplished. But, alas! where is our gratitude for so great a favor? If a prince came from a distance to a village for the purpose of being visited by a peasant, how great would be the ingratitude of the peasant if he refused to visit his sovereign, or if he paid him only a passing visit!

Affections and Prayers.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, O love of my soul! how much has it cost Thee to remain with us in the sacrament? To be able to remain on our altars, Thou hadst first to suffer death; afterward, in order to aid us by Thy presence, Thou hadst to submit to so many grievous insults in this sacrament. And, after all this, we are so slothful and negligent in visiting Thee, though we know that Thou so ardently desirest our visits for the purpose of enriching us with Thy graces when Thou seest us in Thy presence, Lord, pardon me; for I too have been one of these ungrateful souls. From this day forward, O my Jesus! I wish to visit Thee often, and to remain as long as I can in Thy presence, to thank Thee, to love Thee, and to ask Thy graces; for it is for this purpose that Thou remainest on earth shut up in our tabernacles, and made our prisoner of love. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! I love Thee, O God of love! I love Thee, O sovereign Good! amiable above every good. Grant that I may forget myself and all things, in order to remember only Thy love and to spend the remainder of my life wholly occupied in pleasing Thee. Grant that from this day forward I may relish no pleasure more than that of remaining at Thy feet. Inflame my whole soul with Thy holy love. Mary, my mother, obtain for me a great love for the Most Holy Sacrament; and whenever Thou seest that I am negligent, remind me of the promise I now make of going every day to visit the Holy Sacrament.

SECOND POINT.

Jesus Gives Audience to All at all Times.

In the second place, Jesus Christ, in the Blessed Sacrament, gives audience to all. St. Teresa used to say that all cannot speak with the sovereign. The poor can scarcely hope to address him, and make known to him their necessities, even through a third person. But to speak to the King of Heaven, the intervention of a third person is not necessary: all, the poor as well as the nobles of the earth, may speak to him face to face in the Holy

Sacrament. Hence Jesus is called the flower of the fields. *I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys.*[1] The flowers of gardens are inclosed and reserved; but the flowers of the fields are exposed to all. "I am the flower of the field," says Cardinal Hugo, in his comment on this passage, "because I exhibit myself to be found by all." With Jesus, then, in the Holy Sacrament, all may speak every hour in the day. Speaking of the birth of the Redeemer in the stable of Bethlehem, St. Peter Chrysologus says that princes do not always give audience; that when a person goes to address the king, the guards send him away, saying that the hour or day for giving audience is not yet arrived, and telling him to come at another time. But the Redeemer wished to be born in an open cave, without a door and without guards, in order to give audience to all, at all hours: there is no attendant to say, "It is not the hour."[2] The same happens in the Holy Sacrament. The churches are always open: all can go to converse with the King of Heaven whenever they wish. Jesus desires that we speak to him with unbounded confidence: it is for this purpose that he remains under the species of bread. If Jesus appeared on our altars, as he will on the day of judgment, on a throne of glory, who among us would dare to approach him? But, says St. Teresa, because the Lord desires that we speak to him, and ask his graces with confidence and without fear, he has therefore clothed his majesty with the appearance of bread. He desires, as Thomas à Kempis says, that we converse with him as one friend does with another.[3]

When a soul remains at the foot of the altar, Jesus appears to address it in the words of the Canticles: *Arise,*

[1] "Ego flos campi, et lilium convallium."—*Cant.* ii. 1.

[2] "Non est satelles qui dicat: Non est hora."—*In Ps.* iv

[3] Sicut solet dilectus ad dilectum.—l. 4, c. 13.

make haste, my love, my beautiful one, and come.[1] *Arise*, arise, O my soul, and fear not. *Make haste*, approach to me. *My love*, you are no longer my enemy; for you love me, and you repent of having offended me. *My beautiful one*, you are no longer deformed in my eyes: my grace has made you beautiful. *And come*, tell me what you want; I remain here on purpose to hear your prayers. What joy should you feel, dear reader, if a king called you into his cabinet and said to you: *What do you wish for? what do you stand in need of? I love you, and I desire to promote your welfare.* This, Jesus Christ, the King of Heaven, says to all who visit him: *Come to me, all you that labor and are burthened, and I will refresh you.*[2] Come, all you that are poor, infirm, or afflicted; I am able and willing to enrich you, to heal you, to console you. For this purpose I remain on your altars. *Thou shalt call, and he shall say: Here I am.*[3]

Affections and Prayers.

Since then, my beloved Jesus, Thou remainest on our altars to hear the supplications of the miserable who have recourse to Thee, hear the prayer which I, a miserable sinner, present to Thee. O Lamb of God! sacrificed and lifeless on the cross, I am a soul redeemed by Thy blood; pardon me all the offences I have offered to Thee, and assist me by Thy grace, that I may never lose Thee again. Impart to me, O my Jesus! a portion of the sorrow which Thou didst feel in the garden of Gethsemane for my sins. O my God! that I had never offended Thee! My dear Lord, had I died in sin, I could never more love Thee; but Thou hast waited for me that I might love Thee. I thank Thee for the time which Thou givest me: and since I can now love Thee, I wish to love Thee. Give me the grace of Thy holy love, but of a love which will make me forget all things, to

[1] "Surge, propera, amica mea, columba mea, formosa mea, et veni."—*Cant.* ii. 10.

[2] "Venite ad me, omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos."—*Matt.* xi 28.

[3] "Ego ipse qui loquebar. Ecce adsum."—*Isa* lii. 6.

think only of pleasing Thy most loving heart. Ah, my Jesus! Thou hast spent Thy whole life for me: grant that I may spend at least the remainder of my life for Thee. Draw me entirely to Thy love; make me all Thine before I die. I hope for all graces through the merits of Thy Passion. I also hope in thy intercession, O Mary! Thou knowest that I love thee: have pity on me.

THIRD POINT.

Jesus only Wishes to bestow his Graces.

Jesus, in the Holy Sacrament, gives audience to all in order to bestow his graces on all. St. Augustine says that the Lord has a greater desire of communicating his graces to us than we have of receiving them.[1] The reason is, that God is infinite goodness, and goodness is naturally diffusive; therefore, it desires to impart its goods to all. God complains when souls do not come to ask his graces. *Am I*, he says, *become a wilderness to Israel, or a lateward springing land? Why, then, have my people said, We are revolted; we will come to thee no more?*[2] Why, says the Lord, will you come to me no more? Have you, when you asked my graces, found me like a barren or lateward springing land? St. John saw the Lord with his breast full of milk—that is, of mercy—and girded with a band of gold—that is, with the love with which he desires to dispense his graces to us. *I saw one like the Son of man . . . girt about the paps with a golden girdle.*[3] Jesus Christ is always ready to bestow his favors upon us; but the *disciple* says that, in the Holy Sacrament, he dispenses his graces in greater abundance. And, according to Blessed Henry Suso, it is in the Holy Eucharist that Jesus most willingly hears our prayers.

[1] "Plus vult ille dare, quam nos accipere."—*Serm.* 105, *E. B.*

[2] "Numquid solitudo factus sum Israeli, aut terra serotina? Quare ergo dixit populus meus: Recessimus, non veniemus ultra ad te?"—*Jer.* ii. 31.

[3] "Vidi præcinctum ad mamillas zona aurea."—*Apoc.* i. 13.

As a mother whose breasts are full of milk goes in search of infants to give them suck in order to be relieved of the burden, so our Lord from this sacrament of love cries out, and says to us all: *You shall be carried at the breasts. . . . As one whom the mother caresses, so will I comfort you.*[1] Father Balthassar saw Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament, having his hands full of graces, to dispense them to men; but found no one to ask them.

Oh! happy the soul that remains at the foot of the altar to ask graces of Jesus Christ! The Countess of Feria, afterward a religious of the Order of St. Clare, remained as long as she could before the Blessed Sacrament, and was therefore called the spouse of the sacrament. She continually received treasures of graces at the foot of the altar. Being asked one day how she was employed during so many hours before the tabernacle, she answered: "I would remain there for all eternity. I am asked what I do before the Blessed Sacrament. And what do I not do? What does a beggar do in the presence of a rich man? What does a sick man do before his physician? What do I do? I thank my Saviour, I love him, I ask his graces." Oh! how precious these last words are to make us draw fruit from our visits to the Holy Sacrament!

Jesus Christ complained to the servant of God, Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, of the ingratitude of men to him in this sacrament of love. To make her understand the love with which he dwells on our altars, he showed her his heart in a throne of flames, surrounded with thorns and surmounted by a cross, and said to her: "Behold that heart, which has loved men so tenderly, which has reserved nothing, and which has been even consumed to show its love for them. But, in return, the greater part of them treat me with ingratitude by their irrever-

[1] "Ad ubera portabimini. . . . Quomodo si cui mater blandiatur, ita ego consolabor vos."—*Isa.* lxvi. 12.

ence and by their contempt of my love in this sacrament. And what is most painful to me is, that they are hearts consecrated to me." Christians do not visit Jesus Christ because they do not love him. They spend entire hours in the society of friends; and they feel tediousness in conversing half an hour with Jesus Christ. Some will say: Why does not Jesus Christ give me his love? I answer: If you do not banish the world from your heart, how can divine love enter it? Ah! if you could say with sincerity, what St. Philip Neri said at the sight of the Holy Sacrament—*Behold my love! behold my love!*—you should not feel tediousness in spending hours and entire days before the Blessed Sacrament.

To souls enamoured of God, hours spent before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament appear moments. St. Francis Xavier labored the whole day for the salvation of souls; and what was his repose at night? It consisted in remaining before the Holy Sacrament. St. John Francis Regis, that great missionary of France, after having spent the entire day in preaching and hearing confessions, went at night to the church. And having some times found it shut, he remained outside the door, exposed to the cold and wind, to pay homage, at least at a distance, to his beloved Lord. St. Aloysius Gonzaga wished to remain always before the Holy Sacrament; but was forbidden to do so by his Superiors. In passing by the altar, he felt himself drawn by Jesus to remain, but was compelled by obedience to depart. Hence he would lovingly say to his Saviour: "Withdraw from me, O Lord! withdraw."[1] Lord, do not draw me; allow me to depart; obedience obliges me to go away. If, my brother, you do not feel this love for Jesus, endeavor at least to visit him every day: he will certainly inflame your heart. Do you feel cold? Approach the fire, says

[1] Recede a me, Domine, recede.

St. Catharine of Sienna. Ah! happy you, if Jesus, by his grace, inflames you with his love. Then you will certainly no longer love; on the contrary, you will despise all the goods of this world. "When," says St. Francis de Sales, "a house is on fire, all that is within is thrown out through the windows."

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my Jesus! make Thyself known, make Thyself loved. Thou art so amiable, Thou canst do nothing more to induce men to love Thee; how then does it happen that so few among them love Thee? Alas! I have been among these ungrateful wretches. I have been sufficiently grateful to creatures, who have bestowed no gift or favor upon me to Thee only, who hast given me Thyself, have I been ungrateful, so as often to offend Thee grievously, and insult Thee by my sins. But I see that, instead of abandoning me, Thou continuest to seek after me, and to ask my love. I feel that Thou continuest to propose to me this loving precept—"*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.*" Since, then, Thou didst wish to be loved even by me after my ingratitude, I desire to love Thee. Thou wishest for my love, and at present through Thy grace, I desire only to love Thee. I love Thee, my love, my all. Through that blood which Thou hast shed for me, help me to love Thee. My beloved Redeemer! I place all my hopes in this blood, and also in the intercession of Thy most holy Mother, whom Thou wishest to assist me by her prayers in the work of my salvation. O Mary, my Mother! pray to Jesus for me. Thou inflamest all thy lovers with the divine love; I love thee tenderly; procure it also for me.

CONSIDERATION XXXVI.

The Conformity to the Will of God.

"And life in his good will."—*Ps.* xxix. 6.

FIRST POINT.

Excellence of this Virtue.

ALL our salvation and perfection consists in loving God. *He that loveth not, abideth in death. Charity, which is the bond of perfection.*[1] But the perfection of love consists in conformity to the divine will; for, as St. Denis the Areopagite says, the principal effect of love is, to unite the will of lovers, so that they may have but one heart and one will. Hence our actions, our works of penance our Communions and alms-deeds, please God only inas much as they are conformable to the divine will; for, if they are not conformable to the will of God, they are not good works, but are defective, and deserving of chastisement.

Our Saviour came down from heaven principally to teach us by example to conform ourselves to the will of God. Behold what he said, as the apostle writes, at his entrance into this world. *Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not: but a body Thou hast fitted to me. . . . Then, said I, behold I come, . . . that I should do Thy will, O my God.*[2]

[1] "Qui non diligit, manet in morte."—1 *John*, iii. 14. "Charitatem habete, quod est vinculum perfectionis."—*Col.* iii. 14.

[2] "Hostiam et oblationem noluisti; corpus autem aptasti mihi. . . Tunc dixi: Ecce venio, . . . ut faciam, Deus, voluntatem tuam."—*Heb.* x. 5.

Thou, O my Father! hast refused the victims offered by men; Thou wishest that, by my death, I should sacrifice this body which Thou hast given me; behold me ready to do Thy will. This he frequently declared, saying, that he came on earth only to do the will of his Father. *I came down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him that sent Me.*[1] And by going to die through obedience to the will of his Father, he wished to make known to us his great love for his Father. *That the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father hath given Me commandment, so do I. Arise; let us go hence.*[2] Hence he has said that he acknowledges for his disciples only those who fulfil the divine will. *Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.*[3] The accomplishment of the divine will has been the only object and desire of the saints in all their works. Blessed Henry Suso used to say: "I would rather be the vilest worm on earth in conformity to the will of God, than be a seraph with my own will." St. Teresa says: "All that he who practises prayer should seek is, to conform his will to the divine will; and let him be assured," adds the saint, "that in this consists the highest perfection. He who practises it best, will receive the greatest gifts from God, and will make the greatest progress in spiritual life." The blessed in heaven love God perfectly, because they are in all things conformed to the divine will. Hence Jesus Christ has taught us to do the will of God on earth as the saints do it in heaven. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*[4] He who does the will of

[1] "Descendi de cœlo, non ut faciam voluntatem meam, sed voluntatem ejus qui misit me."—*John*, vi. 38.

[2] "Ut cognoscat mundus quia diligo Patrem, et sicut mandatum dedit mihi Pater, sic facio: Surgite, eamus."—*John*, xiv. 31.

[3] "Quicumque enim fecerit voluntatem Patris mei qui in cœlis est, ipse meus frater, et soror, et mater est."—*Matt.* xii. 50.

[4] Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in cœlo, et in terra.

God, will, as David says, become a man according to God's own heart. *I have found a man according to My own heart, who shall do all My wills.*[1] And why? Because David was always prepared to do whatever God wished. *My heart is ready, O my God, my heart is ready.*[2] He asked nothing else from the Lord, than to teach him to do his will.

Oh! how great is the value of an act of perfect resignation to the will of God: it is sufficient to make a saint! While St. Paul was persecuting the Church, Jesus appeared to him, enlightened, and converted him. The saint only offered himself to do the divine will. *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*[3] And behold, Jesus Christ instantly declared him a vessel of election, and apostle of the Gentiles. *This man is to Me a vessel of election to carry My name before the Gentiles.*[4] He who fasts, gives alms, or mortifies himself for God's sake, gives a part of himself to God; but the man who gives his will to God, gives himself entirely to him. All that God asks of us is, our heart—that is, our will. *My son, give Me thy heart.* In a word, the accomplishment of the divine will must be the object of all our desires, of our devotions, meditations, Communions, etc. The object of all our prayers must be to obtain from God the grace to do his will. And for this purpose we must implore the intercession of our holy advocates, and particularly of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that they may procure for us light and strength to conform ourselves to the will of God in

[1] "Inveni David, filium Jesse, virum secundum cor meum, qui faciet omnes voluntates meas."—*Acts*, xiii. 22.

[2] "Paratum cor meum, Deus, paratum cor meum."—*Ps.* lvi. 8; cvii. 2.

[3] "Domine, quid me vis facere?"—*Acts*, ix. 6.

[4] "Vas electionis est mihi iste, ut portet nomen meum coram gentibus."—*Acts*, ix. 15.

[5] "Præbe, fili mi, cor tuum mihi."—*Prov.* xxiii. 26.

all things, but particularly in embracing what is opposed to self-love. The venerable John Avila used to say: "A single 'Blessed be God' in adversity is better than six thousand acts of thanksgiving in prosperity."

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my God! all my past ruin has arisen from a want of conformity to Thy will. O God of my soul! I detest and curse a thousand times the days and moments in which I have, in order to do my own will, contradicted Thy holy will. I now give my whole will to Thee. Accept it, O my Lord! and bind it so firmly to Thy love, that it may never more be able to rebel against Thee. I love Thee, O infinite Goodness! and through the love which I bear Thee, I offer myself entirely to Thee. Dispose of me and of all I possess, as Thou pleasest: I resign myself entirely to Thy holy will. Preserve me from the misfortune of doing anything against Thy holy will, and then treat me as Thou wishest. Eternal Father, hear me for the love of Jesus Christ. My Jesus, hear me through the merits of Thy Passion. Most Holy Mary, assist me; obtain for me the grace to fulfil the divine will, in he accomplishment of which my salvation entirely consists: obtain this grace for me, and I ask nothing more.

SECOND POINT.

In what we should Conform to God's Will.

It is necessary to conform ourselves to the will of God, not only in crosses and adversity which come directly from God, such as infirmities, desolation of spirit, loss of property or relatives; but also in those which come indirectly from him,—that is, through men,—such as defamation, contempt, injuries, and all other persecutions. And let us remember that when others injure us in our property or honor, God does not will their sin, but he wills our poverty and our humiliation. It is certain that whatsoever happens takes place by the divine will. *I am the Lord: I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace.*

and create evil.[1] And Ecclesiasticus says: *Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God.*[2] In a word, all things, blessings as well as misfortunes, come from God.

The crosses that happen to us are called evils, because we call them so, and because we make them evils; if we accepted them as we ought, with resignation, from the hands of God, they should prove to us, not evils, but blessings. The jewels which give the greatest splendor to the crown of the saints are the tribulations which they have borne for God, as coming from his hands. What did holy Job say when he was told that the Sabeans had taken away his property? *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.*[3] He did not say: The Lord gave me these goods, and the Sabeans have taken them away; but the Lord has given them, and the Lord has taken them away. And therefore he blessed the Lord, knowing that all had happened by his will. *And as it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done; blessed be the name of the Lord.*[4] When the holy martyrs Epictetus and Athone were tormented with iron hooks and burning torches, they only said: "Lord, Thy will be done in us." And their dying words were: "O eternal God, be blessed for giving us the grace to accomplish in ourselves Thy holy will." Cesarius relates (lib. x., cap. vi.) that a certain monk wrought many miracles, though his life was not more austere than that of the other monks. Being astonished at his miracles, the abbot asked him one day what devotions he practised. In answer he said that he was more

[1] "Ego Dominus, et non est alter, formans lucem et creans tenebras, faciens pacem et creans malum."—*Isa.* xlv. 6.

[2] "Bona et mala, vita et mors, paupertas et honestas, a Deo sunt."—*Ecclus.* xi. 14.

[3] "Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit."—*Job*, i. 21.

[4] "Sicut Domino placuit, ita factum est; sit nomen Domini benedictum!"—*Job*, i. 21.

imperfect than his companions, but that he was always careful to conform himself in all things to the divine will. "And," said the Superior, "did you feel no displeasure at the injury which an enemy did to our farm some days ago?" 'No," Father, "replied the monk; I, on the contrary, thanked the Lord, because I know that he does and permits all things for our welfare." From this, the abbot perceived the sanctity of this good religious.

We ought to do the same when any cross or adversity happens to us. Let us accept them all from the divine hands, not only with patience, but also with joy, in imitation of the apostles, who rejoiced when they were maltreated for the sake of Jesus Christ. *They went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.*[1] And what greater happiness than to bear crosses, and to know that, in embracing them, we please God? If we wish to enjoy continual peace, let us endeavor, from this day forward, to embrace the divine will, always saying in all that happens to us: *Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight.*[2] Lord, this has pleased Thee, let it be done. To this end we ought to direct all our meditations, Communions, visits, and prayers, always imploring the Lord to make us conform to his will. And let us always offer ourselves to him, saying: "Behold me, O my God! do with me what thou pleasest." St. Teresa offered herself to God at least fifty times in the day, that he might dispose of her as he wished.

Affections and Prayers.

Ah, my divine King, my beloved Redeemer! come and reign henceforth in my soul with undivided sway. Take my whole

[1] "Ibant gaudentes a conspectu concilii, quoniam digni habiti sunt pro nomine Jesu contumeliam pati."—*Acts*, v 41.

[2] "Ita, Pater! quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te."—*Matt.* xi. 26.

will, that it may desire and wish nothing but what Thou wishest. My Jesus, I have hitherto offended Thee so grievously by resisting Thy holy will. This gives me greater pain than if I had suffered every other evil. I repent of it, and am sorry for it with my whole heart. I deserve chastisement; I do not refuse it; I accept it. Preserve me only from the chastisement of being deprived of Thy love, and then do with me whatever Thou pleasest. I love Thee, my dear Redeemer; I love Thee, my God and, because I love Thee, I wish to do whatever Thou wishest. O will of God! Thou art my love. O blood of my Jesus, Thou art my hope. In Thee I hope to be, from this day forward, always united to the divine will. It shall be my guide, my desire, my love, and my peace. In it I wish always to live and repose. *In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest.*[1] I shall always say, in whatever shall befall me: My God, thus Thou hast willed, thus I will; my God, I wish only what Thou wishest, may Thy will be always accomplished in me. *Thy will be done.* My Jesus, through Thy merits, grant me the grace always to repeat this beautiful dictate of love: *Thy will be done! Thy will be done!* O Mary, happy thou, who didst always fulfil, in all things, the divine will. Obtain for me the grace that henceforth I, too, may always fulfil it. My queen, through thy great love for Jesus Christ, obtain for me this grace. Through thy prayers I hope for it.

THIRD POINT.

Happiness Derived from Conformity to God's Will.

He who is united with the divine will, enjoys, even in this life, a perpetual peace. *Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad.*[2] Yes, for a man cannot enjoy greater happiness than that which arises from the accomplishment of all his wishes. He who wills only what God wills, possesses all that he desires; for whatever happens to him, happens by the will of God. If, says Salvian, the soul that is resigned be humbled, it

[1] "In pace, in idipsum, dormiam et requiescam."—*Ps.* iv. 9.

[2] "Non contristabit justum, quidquid ei acciderit.—*Prov.* xii. 21.

desires humiliations; if it is poor, it delights in poverty; in a word, it wishes whatever happens, and thus leads a happy life.[1] Let cold, heat, wind, or rain come, and he that is united with the will of God says: I wish for this cold, this heat, this wind, and this rain, because God wills them. If loss of property, persecution, or sickness befall him, he says: I wish to be miserable, to be persecuted, to be sick, because such is the will of God. He who reposes in the divine will, and is resigned to whatever the Lord does, is like a man who stands above the clouds, and, without injury or perturbation, beholds the tempest raging below. This is the peace which, according to the Apostle, *surpasseth all understanding*,[2] which exceeds all the delights of the world; a perpetual peace, subject to no vicissitudes. *A fool is changed like the moon. . . . A holy man continueth in wisdom like the sun.*[3] Fools—that is, sinners—are changed like the moon, which increases to-day, grows less on to-morrow. To-day they are seen to laugh, and to-morrow to weep; to-day all joy and meekness, to-morrow, all sadness and fury, in a word, they change with prosperity and adversity. But the just man is like the sun, always the same, and uniformly tranquil in whatever happens; for his peace consists in conforming himself to the divine will. *And on earth peace to men of good will.*[4] At the bare mention of the *will of God*, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi used to feel much consolation that she would fall into an ecstasy of love. When the will is united with the will of God, crosses may produce some pain in the inferior part, but in the superior part peace shall always reign. *Your joy*

[1] "Humiles sunt, hoc volunt; pauperes sunt, pauperie delectantur; itaque beati dicendi sunt."—*De Gub. D.* l. 1, n. 2.

[2] "Exsuperat omnem sensum."—*Phil.* iv. 7.

[3] "Homo sanctus in sapientia manet sicut sol: nam stultus sicut luna mutatur."—*Ecclus.* xxvii. 12.

[4] "Et in terra pax hominibus."—*Luke*, ii. 14.

no man shall take from you.[1] But how great the folly of those who oppose the will of God! What God wills will certainly happen; *for who resisteth his will?*[2] They, therefore, must bear the cross, but without fruit and without peace. *Who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?*[3]

And what else but our welfare does God will? *This is the will of your God, your sanctification.*[4] He wishes to see us saints, that we may be content in this life, and happy in the next. Let us remember that the crosses which come to us from God *work together unto good.*[5] Even chastisements are inflicted on us in this life, not for ruin, but that we may amend, and gain eternal beatitude. *Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord . . . have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction.*[6] God loves us so ardently, that he not only desires, but is solicitous for, the salvation of each of us. *The Lord is careful for me.*[7] And what will he deny us after having given us his Son? *He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how hath He not also with Him given us all things.*[8] Let us then always abandon ourselves into the hands of that God who is always solicitous for our welfare as long as we remain in this world. *Casting all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.*[9] Think of me, said our Lord to St. Catharine of Sienna,

[1] "Gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis."—*John*, xvi. 22.

[2] "Voluntati enim ejus quis resistit?"—*Rom.* ix. 19.

[3] "Quis restitit ei, et pacem habuit?"—*Job*, ix. 4.

[4] "Hæc est enim voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra."—1 *Thess.* iv. 3.

[5] "Omnia cooperantur in bonum."—*Rom.* viii. 28.

[6] "Ad emendationem, non ad perditionem nostram, evenisse credamus."—*Judith*, viii. 27.

[7] "Dominus sollicitus est mei."—*Ps.* xxxix. 18.

[8] "Qui etiam proprio Filio suo non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum, quomodo non etiam cum illo omnia nobis donavit?"—*Rom.* viii. 32.

[9] "Omnem sollicitudinem vestram projicientes in eum, quoniam ipsi cura est de vobis."—1 *Peter*, v. 7.

and I will always think of you. Let us often say with the spouse of the Canticles: *My beloved to me, and I to him.*[1] My beloved thinks of my welfare, and I will think only of pleasing him, and of uniting myself to his holy will. We ought, says the holy Abbot Nilus, to pray, not that God would do what we wish, but that we may do what he wills.

He who always acts in this manner will lead a happy life, and will die a happy death. He who dies with entire resignation to the divine will, gives to others a moral certainty of his salvation. But he who is not united with the divine will during life, will not be united with it at death, and will not be saved. Let us, then, endeavor to make ourselves familiar with some sayings of the Scripture, by which we shall always keep ourselves united with the will of God. *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?* Lord, tell me what Thou wishest me to do; I am ready and willing to do it. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.*[2] Behold! my soul is Thy servant; command, and Thou shalt be obeyed. *I am Thine; save me.*[4] Save me, O Lord! and then do what Thou pleasest with me; save Thine, I am no longer mine. When any serious cross or adversity happens to us, let us say: *Yea, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight.*[5] My God, this has pleased Thee; let it be done. Above all, let the third petition of the Lord's prayer be dear to us: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Let us say it often, with fervor, and let us repeat it several times. Happy we, if we live and die saying: *Thy will be done! Thy will be done!*

[1] "Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi."—*Cant.* ii. 16.
[2] "Domine, quid me vis facere?"—*Acts*, ix. 6.
[3] "Ecce ancilla Domini."—*Luke*, i. 38.
[4] "Tuus sum ego, salvum me fac."—*Ps.* cxviii. 94.
[5] "Ita, Pater, quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te."—*Matt.* xi. 26.

Affections and Prayers.

O Jesus, my Redeemer! Thou hast sacrificed Thy life on the cross in order to become the cause of my salvation: have mercy on me, then, and save me; do not permit a soul that Thou hast redeemed by so many pains, and with so much love, to hate Thee for eternity in hell. Thou canst do nothing more to oblige me to love Thee. This Thou gavest me to understand, when, before Thou didst expire on Calvary, Thou didst utter these loving words: *It is consummated.* But how have I repaid Thy love? For the past, I can truly say that I have done all I could to displease Thee, and to oblige Thee to hate me. I thank Thee for having borne me with so much patience, and for now giving me time to repair my ingratitude, and to love Thee before I die. Yes, I wish to love Thee, and I wish to love Thee ardently, my Saviour, my God, my love, and my all; I wish to do whatever is pleasing to Thee; I give Thee my whole will, my whole liberty, and all that I possess. From this hour I sacrifice my life to Thee, accepting the death which Thou wilt send me, along with all the pains and circumstances that will accompany it. From this moment I unite this sacrifice of mine to the great sacrifice of Thy life, which Thou, my Jesus, didst offer for me on the cross. I wish to die in order to do Thy will. Ah! through the merits of Thy Passion, give me grace to be, during life, resigned to the arrangements of Thy Providence. And when death comes, grant that I may embrace, with an entire conformity, Thy holy will. I wish to die, O my Jesus! in order to please Thee. I wish to die saying: *Thy will be done.* Mary, my mother, it was thus thou didst die; ah! obtain for me the grace that I too may die in this manner.

Live, Jesus, our love, and Mary, our hope

PLAN FOR A RETREAT OF EIGHT DAYS.

Introductory Meditation.

The present life is a journey to eternity.....Consid. XIV.

First Day.

Med. I. Importance of salvation ..... XII.
II. Value of time..... XI.
III. Vanity of the world..... XIII.

Second Day.

I. Malice of mortal sin..... XV.
II. Number of sins..... XVIII.
III. Abuse of divine grace ..... XVII.

Third Day.

I. Certainty of death..... IV.
II. Portrait of a man who has recently gone into eternity..... I.
III. Death of the sinner ..... III.

Fourth Day.

I. Delusions which the devil puts into the mind of sinners..... XXIII.
II. Particular judgment ..... XXIV.
III. Pains of hell ..... XXVI.

Fifth Day.

I. Eternity of hell..... XXVII.
II. Remorse of the damned..... XXVIII.
III. Mercy of God..... XVI.

Sixth Day.

I. Great advantages of the grace of God..... XIX.
II. The love of God..... XXXIII.
III. Death of the just ..... VIII.

Seventh Day.

I. Prayer ..... XXX.
II. Conformity to the divine will..... XXXVI.
III. Heaven..... XXIX.

Eighth Day.

I. Holy Communion..... XXXIV.
II. Confidence in Mary..... XXXII.
III. Perseverance..... XXXI.

HYMN.

The Soul Enamoured of the Beauty of God.

Let those who will for other beauties pine,
  God, God alone my love shall ever be;
My God, my life! O loveliness divine!
  Whom can I wish to love, and love not Thee?

Where could I find a nobler, lovelier heart,
  A heart more worthy object of my love?
Such loveliness, that but to see a part
  Can ravish with delight the saints above.

Ah! foolish souls, that throw away your hearts
  On love of beauties earthly, false, and vain!
Ah! see you not that all true peace departs,
  And leaves within but emptiness and pain?

Love God, love him, the beauty infinite,—
  Love God alone, who loveth you so much;
Ah, happy you, if loving him aright
  You know the secret ways his heart to touch.

Ye who love God! souls beautiful and chaste!
  Do I not speak the truth? Bear witness, say
What peace, what joy he gives your hearts to taste
  While yet poor exiles here on earth you stay.

Thrice happy now! Ah! then what will you say
  When once you reach in heaven the home of bliss!
What, when you see unveiled in cloudless day
  Your God, the God of beauty, as he is?

Alas! could I but live my life again,
  In loving him should be my sole content:
At least, whate'er of life may yet remain
  Shall all in loving God alone be spent.

Shall it not be, O loveliness divine?
Then if Thou will it so, give me Thy love;
I seek in vain to give Thee love of mine,
Unless Thy hand first help me from above.

But more Thou lovest me than I love Thee,
I seek Thy love, but more Thou seekest mine;
Then Thou belongest even now to me,
And I shall all and evermore be Thine.

MAXIMS OF ETERNITY;

OR,

MEDITATIONS

FOR EVERY DAY IN THE WEEK.[1]

MEDITATION FOR SUNDAY.

The End of Man.

I.

CONSIDER, O my soul! that the being which you enjoy was given to you by God: he created you to his own image, without any merit on your part; he adopted you for his child by baptism; he loved you more than the most affectionate parent could have loved you; he has made you all you are, that you might know him, love him, and serve him in this life, and thereby arrive at the eternal possession of him in heaven. Hence you

[1] These meditations are an excellent summary of the foregoing Considerations on the Last Things of man. As they contain nothing exclusively proper to the days of the week to which they have been assigned, they may also be used at other times.

They are substantially the same as those that are found in the works of Father Sarnelli (*Il Cristiano santificato*) and in those of St. Leonard of Port Maurice (*Via del paradiso*), and perhaps elsewhere, since neither appears to be the author of them. St. Alphonsus arranged them according to his own method, and inserted them in the first work that he published, about the year 1747, under the title of "Smaller Spiritual Works" (*Operette spirituali*).—ED.

did not come into this world for the sake of enjoyment to grow rich and powerful, to eat, drink, and sleep like irrational animals, but solely to love your God and to work out your eternal salvation. And is this the object that I have hitherto had in view? Oh! how unfortunate have I been, in having thought of everything else rather than of my last end. O God! I beg of Thee, in the name and for the love of Jesus, to grant that I may begin a new life of perfect holiness and conformity to Thy divine will.

II.

Consider what deep remorse and bitter regret you will feel at the hour of death, if, during life, you have not devoted yourself to the service of God. How great will be your disappointment when, at the close of your days, you will perceive that nothing remains at that sorrowful moment of all your goods, of all your pleasures, and of all your earthly glory, but a shadow that flies before you, and a bitter remembrance which pursues you! What will be your consternation when you will discover that, for the sake of miserable vanities, you have lost your God, your soul, and your salvation, without the possibility of being able to repair your misfortune? O despair! O cruel torment! you will then see the value of the time that you are losing; but it will be too late. Gladly would you then purchase time at the price of all you have; but you will not be able to do so. Oh! how full of bitterness and sorrow will that day be for every soul that has not loved and served the Lord!

III.

Consider the general disregard of men for their last end. Their ordinary thoughts are upon the accumulation of wealth, the gratification of their senses, parties of pleasure, amusement, and festivity. They think nothing of God or of his service; they do nothing for the

salvation of their souls: they regard the affair of salvation as a trifle not worthy of notice. Thus, O deplorable misfortune! the greater part of Christians, by indulging in foolish pleasures and criminal gratifications, precipitate themselves into hell. O man! you take much pains to damn yourself, and will you do nothing for your salvation? Listen to the dying sentiments of a Secretary of State of one of the kings of England: "How great," said he, "is my misfortune: I have used many sheets of paper in writing letters for my sovereign, and, alas! I have not used one to help me in the recollection of my sins, that I might make a good confession!" Listen to the death-bed sentiments of a king of Spain: "Oh that I had spent my life in a desert, occupied in serving God, and had never been a king!" But to what do these sighs and lamentations then serve, but to augment the horrors of despair? Learn, then, this day, at the expense of others, to devote yourself to the salvation of your soul: remember well that all your actions, all your words, and all your thoughts, that are not directed to God, are entirely lost. Oh! it is time then to amend your life. Do not wait, therefore, to be convinced of this till you arrive at the gates of eternity, and the jaws of hell: it will be then too late. O my God! pardon me all the errors of my life: I love Thee above all things. I am sorry, from the bottom of my heart, for all my sins. O Mary! my hope, intercede with Jesus in my behalf.

MEDITATION FOR MONDAY.

The Importance of our Last End.

I.

Consider, O man! how important it is to you to save your soul. Your dearest interests are there concerned, because, if you attain salvation, you will be eternally happy in the enjoyment of every good both of soul and

body; but, in losing it, you lose your soul and body; heaven and God: you will be eternally miserable, eternally damned. Your only important, your only necessary affair, therefore, is to serve your God and to save your soul. Do not, then, O Christian! think of serving your passions now, and of giving yourself to God hereafter. Oh, how many has this false and deceitful hope precipitated into hell! Thousands of sinners have flattered themselves with the hope of future repentance; but the day in which they hoped never arrived, and they are now suffering without resource the torments of the damned. And who amongst them all ever thought of falling into that place of woe? Which of them had not the intention of saving his soul? But God curses him that sins in the hope of pardon.[1] You say perhaps, within yourself, I will commit this sin and then repent: but are you sure that time will be allowed you for repentance? You may die the moment you have sinned. By sinning you lose the grace of God; and what if you never more recover it? God shows mercy to those who fear him, but not to those who contemn and despise him.[2] Think not, therefore, that it will cost you no more to repent of and confess three sins than to repent of and confess one sin. No: in this thought you are deceived; God might pardon you a first or a second sin, but not a third. He has patience with the sinner for a time, but not forever.[3] When the measure of iniquity is filled up, his mercy ceases, and he punishes the impenitent sinner either by death, or by abandoning him to a reprobate sense, in which state he goes on from sin to sin without remorse, and at length is precipitated into hell. O Christian! attend seriously to this. It is time you should put an end to your disorders and return to God; you should fear lest

[1] Maledictus homo qui peccat in spe.

[2] "Et misericordia ejus . . . timentibus eum."—*Luke*, i. 50

[3] "In plenitudine peccatorum puniat."—2 *Mach.* vi. 14.

this will be the last warning that he will ever send you. You have offended him long enough, and he has borne with you long enough in your sins: tremble, then, lest he should forsake you after the next mortal sin. Oh! how many souls has this striking thought of eternity caused to retire from the disorders and dangers of the world, to live in cloisters, solitudes, and deserts! Unfortunate sinner that I have been! what is the fruit of all my crimes?—a conscience gnawed with despair, a troubled heart, a soul overwhelmed with grief, hell deserved, and God lost! Ah! my God, my heavenly Father! bind me to Thy love.

II.

Consider, O man! that this affair of eternity is above all others the most neglected. Mankind have time to think of everything but God and salvation. If a man of the world is advised to frequent the sacraments, or to spend a quarter of an hour daily in meditation, he will immediately say: I have a family to provide for, I have my business to attend to, I have sufficient to keep me employed. Good God! and have you not a soul to save? Will your riches and your family be able to assist you at the hour of your death, or deliver you from hell if you are condemned? No, no: flatter not yourself that you are able to reconcile God and the world, heaven and sin together. Salvation is not to be attained by a life of indolence and ease. It is necessary to use violence and to make great efforts in order to obtain the crown of immortality. How many Christians have flattered themselves with the idea of serving God and saving their souls hereafter, who are at this moment, and will forever be, in the flames of hell! How great is the folly of men in attending to what will so shortly terminate, and thinking so little of that state which will never end! Ah, Christian! put your affairs in order; reflect that your all

is at stake: remember that, in a very short time, your body will be deposited in the earth, and your soul will go to dwell in the house of eternity. How dreadful, then, will be your misfortune if you are condemned to an eternity of woe! Reflect well on this; for then you can have no remedy.

III.

Consider and say within yourself: I have a soul, and if I lose it all is lost; I have a soul, and if in losing it I were to gain the whole world, what would it profit me? I have a soul, but if I lose it, although I were to arrive at the highest pinnacle of glory, of what advantage will it be to me? If I hoard up riches, if I get forward in the world, but in the end lose my soul, what will be my consolation? Where are now the dignities, pleasures, and vanities of those great ones of the world whose bodies are mouldering in the dust and whose souls are a prey to the flames of hell? Since, then, I have a soul, and only one, to save, and if I lose it once it is lost forever, I ought to endeavor to save it. This is an affair of the highest importance to me. Eternal happiness and eternal misery are at stake. O my God! I am forced to acknowledge with shame and confusion that I have hitherto blindly wandered astray from Thee: I have scarcely ever thought seriously of saving my soul. O my Father! save me, through Jesus Christ. I am willing to part with everything here, provided I do not lose Thee. O Mary, my surest hope! save me by thy powerful intercession.

MEDITATION FOR TUESDAY.

Mortal Sin.

1.

Consider, O my soul! that having been created to love God, you have rebelled against him, and thereby

been guilty of the basest ingratitude. You have treated him like an enemy; you have despised his grace and friendship. You were aware how much sin offends him, and still you have committed it. Yes, you have turned your back on God; you have insulted him; you have in a manner raised your hand to strike him; you have saddened his Holy Spirit. The man who sins says to God, if not in words, at least in effect: Begone from me: I will not serve Thee, I will not acknowledge Thee for my God: the God whom I adore is this pleasure, this interest, this revenge. Such has been the language of your heart every time that you have preferred any creature to God.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi could not conceive how a Christian could knowingly commit a mortal sin. O you who are reading these lines, what are your sentiments? how many mortal sins have you committed? O my God! pardon me, have mercy on me: I detest all my sins; I love Thee, and grieve sincerely for the insults that I have offered to Thee, who are deserving of infinite love.

II.

Consider that God thus spoke to your heart at the moment you were offending him: My son, I am your God, who created you and redeemed you with the price of my blood. I forbid you, then, to commit that sin under pain of incurring my eternal displeasure. But in yielding to the temptation you have replied: Lord, I will not obey Thee; I am resolved to gratify my passions; I value not Thy friendship. *Thou hast said, I will not serve.*[1] Ah! my God: and this I have done many, perhaps thousands of times. How couldst Thou bear with my insults? Why did I not die rather than live to offend Thee? But, O infinite goodness! I will do so no more; henceforth I will love Thee with all my heart. Give me perseverance; give me Thy holy love.

[1] "Dixisti: Non serviam."—*Jer.* ii. 20.

III.

Consider, O my soul! that, when sins reach a certain number, they cause God to abandon the sinner. *The Lord patiently expecteth that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them in the fulness of sins.*[1] If, therefore, you are again tempted to return to your sins, say no more within yourself, I will commit this one, and will then repent. For what if the Lord should instantly strike you dead? or what if he should forsake you forever? What has been the fate of thousands who have thus lost the grace of God? They flattered themselves with the hope of pardon; but death surprised them, and hell enveloped them in its flames. Tremble, then, lest your fate be the same. Those who abuse the goodness of God in order to offend him are undeserving of his mercy. After the multitude of crimes that he has pardoned you, you have too much reason to fear that, if you relapse into mortal sin, he will pardon you no more. Thank him, then, a thousand times for having borne patiently with you until now, and form the resolution rather to die than to offend him any more. Say frequently to him: My God! I have already offended Thee enough: the remainder of my life shall be spent in loving Thee and in bewailing my past ingratitude. O my Jesus! I wish to love Thee; grant me the grace to do so. O Blessed Virgin, my Mother! assist me by thy prayers. Amen.

MEDITATION FOR WEDNESDAY.

Death.

I.

Consider that this life must soon terminate. The sentence is already passed: You must die. Death is certain, but the moment of it is uncertain: we know not when

[1] "Dominus patienter exspectat, ut, cum judicii dies advenerit, in plenitudine peccatorum puniat."—2 *Mach.* vi. 14.

it will come. But to how many casualties and accidents is human life constantly exposed? The bleeding of an artery, a stroke of apoplexy, the bite of a venomous animal, an inundation, an earthquake, a thunderbolt, and numberless other causes that we can neither foresee nor prevent, may deprive you instantly of life. Death may surprise you when you least expect it. How many have gone to bed at night in apparent good health, and in the morning have been found dead? And may not the same happen to you? Numberless others, who have been visited by sudden death, never expected to die in that manner; and, if they were then found in mortal sin, what is now their fate, and what will it be through all eternity? But, at all events, it is certain that either the night will come, when you will no more see the day, or the day will come, when you will no more see the night. "I shall come," says Jesus Christ, "like a thief in the night, when I am the least expected."—*Matt.* xxiv. 44. Your good master warns you of this beforehand, because he wishes your salvation. O sinner! correspond, then, with this mercy, profit by this admonition, hold yourself always in readiness for death. When that moment comes there will be no time for preparation. Consider well that you must certainly die. The scene of this world must soon terminate for you, though you know not when. Who can tell whether it will be within a year, within a month, within a week, or even whether you will be alive to-morrow? O my Jesus! give me light, and pardon me.

II.

Consider that, at the hour of your death, you will be extended on a bed, with your relatives and friends weeping over you, a priest to assist you, a lighted taper by your side, within one step of the terrible passage into eternity. Your head will be oppressed with pain, your eyes will become dim, your tongue parched with heat,

your blood cooling in your veins, and your heart in agony: you will see the world passing from before you. No sooner will your soul become separated from your body than you will be stripped of all things, and cast into the earth to rot. There you will become the food of worms, which will gnaw and devour your flesh, and in a short time nothing will remain of your body but a few withered bones and a little dust. Open a grave, and take a view of the state of that rich and avaricious man! of that vain woman! Ah! such is the termination of human life; such is the end of mortal man, and such will soon be yours. But penetrate with the eyes of faith into the other world, and see the condition in which your soul will be placed. It will instantly be surrounded by the monsters of hell, representing before you all the sins that you have committed from your very childhood. At present the devil hides from you the malice of your crimes: he persuades you that there is little evil in this act of vanity, this indulgence, this resentment, this dangerous company; but in death he will display before your eyes the enormity of your sins, to make you despair. Then you will discover in the light of God himself the evil which you have committed in offending his infinite goodness. Ah! hasten then, whilst time remains, to make reparation for what is past: at the hour of death it will be too late.

III.

Consider that death is a moment on which eternity depends. Take a view of a man who is on the point of expiring, and reflect that he is just going to enter into one or other of the two eternities; his fate is pending but for a moment: when that is expired, he is either saved or condemned forever. O this last breath! O this moment on which depends an eternity!—an eternity either of torment or of glory; an eternity either always

happy or always miserable; an eternity either of all that is good or of all that is evil; an eternity either of heaven or of hell. If you are then saved, you will be secure from all evils, and at the summit of happiness and content; if you are condemned, you will live in punishment and despair as long as God will be God. In death you will understand the meaning of heaven, hell, sin, an offended God, the contempt of divine laws, sins concealed in confession, ill-gotten goods unrestored, injuries not pardoned. "Unhappy me!" will the dying man say, "in a few moments I must appear in the presence of God. What will my sentence be? Whither shall I go? To heaven or to hell? Shall I be happy with the saints or burn with the damned? Shall I be a child of God or a slave of the devil? Alas! but a minute more and I shall know; and the destiny which I shall then receive will last for all eternity." Then will you detest a thousand times the day on which you had the misfortune to sin. But it will be too late; your sorrow will be fruitless, because it will proceed from the fear and not from the love of God. Ah, my God! from this hour I will turn to Thee: I will not delay my repentance until death. I now love Thee, I embrace Thee, and I wish to die in Thy embraces. O Mary! my true Mother, let me die under thy protection: help me at that critical and decisive moment.

MEDITATION FOR THURSDAY.

Judgment.

I.

CONSIDER that the soul will no sooner have departed from the body than it will appear before the tribunal of God to be judged. This judge is the Almighty, whose wrath is provoked by your sins. Your accuser will be your mortal enemy, the devil; the matter of your trial will be

your sins; your sentence will be without appeal; and if found guilty, your punishment will be hell. You will not have the power of calling your parents, friends, and companions to your aid: all must be concluded between God and your soul. You will then see the deformity of your crimes, and will not be able, as at present, to excuse them. You will be examined upon all your sins of thought, of words, of actions, of omissions, of scandal; you will be weighed in the terrible scales of divine justice, and, if found wanting in a single point, you are lost. My Jesus and my Judge, pardon me before Thou dost judge me.

II.

Consider that, at the end of the world, our bodies will rise again to participate in the reward or punishment of the soul according to our works, when all the nations of the earth will be assembled in the valley of Josaphat to be judged. If you are condemned, you will resume your body as an eternal prison for your unfortunate soul. At this sorrowful reunion the soul will curse the body and the body the soul, so that, although at present they mutually consent to pursue unlawful pleasures, after death, they will become each other's tormentor. On the other hand, if you are saved, your body will arise beautiful, impassible, and glorious, and thus, both in body and soul, you will be judged worthy of eternal happiness. Thus will close the scene of this world: thus will terminate all the greatness, all the pleasures, and all the pomps of the earth. Yes, all will be at an end; nothing will remain but two eternities, one of glory, the other of pain; one of joy, the other of torments: the just will dwell in heaven, the wicked in hell. Woe, then, to him that has loved the world! woe to him that for the vain and fleeting pleasures of the earth has lost his soul, his body, heaven, and God!

III.

Consider the eternal sentence which Jesus Christ will pass upon the reprobate and the elect. This sovereign Judge, turning towards the reprobate, will say: "Behold, ye ungrateful wretches, the event of your crimes! My hour is come—the hour of truth, of justice, of vengeance, and of wrath. Criminal souls, you have chosen my curse; let it fall upon you: be ye cursed for all eternity. Depart from me, despoiled of every good and laden with all evil, into eternal fire." [1] Then turning towards the elect Jesus will thus address them: "Come, ye blessed children of my heavenly Father, come and take possession of the kingdom of heaven which is prepared for you. Come, no longer to carry your cross after me, but to wear a crown. Come to inherit my riches, and to be the companions of my glory. Come from the land of exile to your true country; come from sufferings to glory, from tears to joy." O my Jesus! I hope to be one of those whom Thou wilt then bless. I love Thee above all things. Bless me at this moment. O my Mother Mary, do thou also bless me.

MEDITATION FOR FRIDAY.

Hell.

I.

Consider that hell is a dreadful prison filled with fire. In this fire the reprobate are enveloped, having an abyss of fire above them, and around them and below them, in their eyes, their mouths, and throughout every part of their frame. There each sense suffers a torment peculiar to itself. The eyes are tormented with darkness and smoke, and at the same time by the sight of devils and damned souls; the ears hear nothing

[1] "Discedite a me, maledicti, in ignem æternum."—*Matt.* xxv. 41.

but continual howlings, lamentations and blasphemies; the smell is tormented by the stench of half-putrefied bodies; the taste by a burning thirst and cruel hunger, without the possibility of being alleviated by a drop of water or a morsel of bread. Hence proceed from those miserable captives, tears, groans, lamentations, howlings and despair; but all in vain: they will never obtain the smallest consolation under their torments, or the least mitigation of their pains. O hell, hell! shall we wait until we are buried in your flames to believe you and to fear you? And yet this is the conduct of thoughtless and unrepenting sinners. O you who are reading this, what is your state? were you to die this moment, whither would you go? Ah! you could not endure the pain of a spark of fire falling upon your hand, and have you the assurance to expose yourself to the hazard of burning in a pool of fire, in desolation and despair for all eternity?

II.

Consider the punishments that will be inflicted in hell on all the powers of the soul. The memory will be forever tormented with the recollection of sin, and with remorse of conscience; this gnawing worm will continually remind you that you have damned yourself for some miserable pleasure or interest. O God! what will the soul think of past pleasures, after hundreds, thousands, and millions of years spent in hell? This gnawing worm will call to its recollection the time which God had given it for repentance, the means of salvation wherewith he had furnished it, the good example which he had set before it, and the resolutions which it had formed, but would never execute. The soul will, moreover, see that its present state is irremediable. O God, O God! how terrible is hell. The will, also, will be eternally contradicted; it will never obtain what it wishes, and will always meet with what it would gladly avoid. The un-

derstanding will discover the greatness of the good which it has lost in losing heaven and God. O God! O God! pardon me, for the love of Jesus Christ.

III.

Sinner, you, who at present make small account o losing God, will discover your misfortune, when you will see the elect triumph and exult with joy on their entrance into heaven, and yourself banished, like an unclean animal, from that blessed country, deprived forever of seeing the face of an infinitely amiable God, and separated from the company of Mary, of the angels and saints. Then, in fury and despair, you will exclaim: "O paradise of delights: O God of infinite goodness! thou art not and never will be mine." Repent, then; change your life; do not wait till the time of repentance is at an end. Give yourself to God; begin truly to love him. Beg of Jesus and Mary to have pity on you.

MEDITATION FOR SATURDAY.

The Eternity of the Pains of Hell.

I.

CONSIDER that the torments of hell will never terminate. The damned suffer in every way, and they suffer eternally. A hundred years of suffering will pass away, a thousand will pass away, and hell will still be only at its beginning. A hundred thousand and a thousand million of years and ages will pass, and hell will still begin anew. Were an angel to be sent to one of the damned, informing him that, after as many million of ages have expired as there are drops of water in the sea, leaves upon the trees, and grains of sand on the seashore or upon the earth, he should be delivered from hell, this news would fill him with inconceivable joy. For although he would be compelled to suffer for an innumer-

able multitude of ages, still he would be able to say: The time will come when my sufferings will end. But alas! as many ages will really expire, and hell will be only at its beginning. Nay, this number of ages may be multiplied as many times as there are grains of sand on the earth, drops of water in the ocean, and leaves on the trees, and, at the close of this immense period, hell will begin again. There is not a wretch in that abode of torments, that would not willingly make this proposition to the Almighty. "Increase, O Lord, as much as Thou pleasest, my torments, prolong the duration of them to any extent Thou pleasest, provided they may terminate." But no: this termination will never be granted. It would be an alleviation, if the unfortunate sufferer could flatter himself with the hope that perhaps the Lord would one day have compassion on him and deliver him from hell. But alas! he will always keep the sentence of his eternal reprobation before his eyes, and will see that all these pains, this fire, this despair, these lamentations, will never cease, will never end. O hell! O eternity! how can men believe in you and yet continue in sin?

II.

Christian soul! pay attention to these truths: remember that hell is for you, if you live in sin. This horrible furnace is already enkindled under your feet, and numbers throughout the world are falling into it, whilst you are reading this. Reflect, that if the same misfortune ever befalls you, it will be irreparable; if ever, then, you did deserve hell, thank God with all your heart for his mercy in having spared you. Weep over your sins; employ every possible means of securing your salvation; frequently approach the sacraments; read daily some pious book, entertain a sincere devotion to the Blessed Virgin, recite every day the Rosary, and fast every Saturday in her honor; be firm and resolute in resisting the

beginning of tempation, invoking frequently the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary; flee from all occasions of sin; in short, use your utmost endeavors to avoid eternal misery, remembering that there cannot be too great security where eternity is at stake. Consider what numbers of men have hidden themselves in deserts, and shut themselves up in caverns, in order the more effectually to secure their eternal welfare. And what are you doing? Oh! give yourself sincerely to God, and say to him from your heart: Lord, behold I am now Thy servant: ready and willing to do whatever Thou commandest me. Mary, assist me.

HYMN.

The Soul Sighing for Heaven

Oh! I am dying of desire,
  Sweet Lord, to see Thy face;
To linger here on earth I tire,
  O God of loveliness!
A pang so bitter rends my heart,
  I can no more endure the smart;
Ah! do not, Lord, my grief despise.
  I live indeed apart from Thee,
But hope and cry unceasingly,
  O Paradise! O Paradise!

An empty joy, which ends in pain,
  Is all this world bestows;
Deceitful pomp and pageant vain,
  Which death anon will close.
He to whom all save God is nought
  Best knows the anguish of the thought—
I yet might lose my prize;
  On Thee I fix my longing gaze,
To Thee alone my sighs I raise,
  O Paradise! O Paradise!

In vain Thou wouldst ensnare my heart
  With wealth and empty joys;
Go, world, thy gifts to those impart
  Who madly love such toys.
Vain pomps, or pleasures stained with sin
  Ah! do not hope my hopes to win,
For other goods my spirit sighs:—
  To reign in heaven I aspire;
This is my hope, this my desire,
  O Paradise! O Paradise!

O beauteous home! where love's reward
  Love will itself bestow;
Where my so sweet and loving Lord
  Himself unveiled will show.
When shall I see that blest abode,
  And there behold and love my God?
When will that wished-for dawn arise?
  While now I cry, 'twixt smiles and tears,
Ah, when, ah, when shall end my fears?
  O Paradise! O Paradise!

A CHRISTIAN'S RULE OF LIFE.*

In this Rule the first chapter treats of the means we must make use of to keep ourselves in the grace of God. In the second, the acts of those devout exercises which should be practised are set forth at length. In the third is shown the exercise of the principal virtues which a Christian ought to practise.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEANS OF PRESERVING THE GRACE OF GOD.

We must be fully persuaded, that in order to obtain eternal salvation, it is not sufficient to wish to be saved; but we must further use the means which have been left us by Jesus Christ. Otherwise, if we commit sins, it will not avail us in the day of judgment to excuse ourselves by saying that the temptations were great, and we were weak; because God has given us the means, through his grace, to conquer all the assaults of our enemies: if, then we do not take advantage of them, and are overcome, the fault will be our own. All men desire to be saved;

* "The Rule of Life" was published about the year 1767, in the volume entitled "The Way of Salvation," of which it formed the third part with the treatise called "Darts of Fire." In the general order of the works of Saint Alphonsus it naturally found its place under the title of the present volume that contains the foundation of the spiritual life; it is the complement, the practical conclusion of the Considerations on the eternal truths, as the Author himself so very frequently intimates.—Ed.

but because they omit to employ the means of salvation they sin and are lost.

1. To Flee from the Occasions of Sin.

The first means is, to avoid all occasions of sin. It is impossible for any one who does not endeavor to flee from the occasions of sin, especially in the matter of sensual pleasures, to avoid falling into sin. St. Philip Neri said: "In the war of the senses, the conquerors are the *cowards* who fly." The occasion is like a veil put before our eyes, so that we can see nothing else—neither God, nor hell, nor the resolutions we had made. The Scripture says, it is impossible to walk on burning coals without being burnt: *Or can he walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?*[1] So it is morally impossible for any one to put himself voluntarily into the occasion of sin and not to fall, although he may have made a thousand resolutions and a thousand promises to God. This is clearly shown every day by the misery of so many poor souls who are plunged into vice for not avoiding the occasions. Any one who has had the evil habit of sins of impurity must know that, in order to restrain himself, it is not enough merely to avoid those occasions which are absolutely proximate; for if he does not also flee from those which are not altogether proximate, he will easily fall again. Nor must we allow ourselves to be deceived by the devil into thinking that the person towards whom we are tempted is a saint; it often happens that the more devout a person is, the stronger is the temptation. St. Thomas Aquinas says, that the holiest persons attract the most. The temptation will begin in a spiritual way, and will terminate carnally. The great servant of God F. Sertorio Caputo, of the Society of Jesus, said that the devil first induces one to love a person's virtue, then the per-

[1] "Numquid potest homo . . . ambulare super prunas, ut non comburantur plantæ ejus?"—*Prov.* vi. 27.

son, and then blinds one and brings one to ruin. We must also flee from evil companions: we are too weak; the devil is continually tempting us, and the senses are drawing us to evil; the slightest suggestion of a bad companion is only wanting to make us fall. Therefore the first thing that we have to do to save ourselves is to avoid evil occasions and bad companions. And we must in this matter do violence to ourselves, resolutely overcoming all human respect. Those who do not use violence to themselves will not be saved. It is true, that we must not put confidence in our own strength, but only in the divine assistance; but God wills that we should do our part in doing violence to ourselves, when it is *necessary* to do so, in order to gain Paradise: *The violent bear it away.*[1]

2. Mental Prayer.

The second means is *mental prayer.* Without this, the soul will find it almost impossible to remain a long time in the grace of God. The Holy Spirit says: *In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.*[2] He who often meditates on the Four Last Things, namely, death, judgment, and the eternity of hell and paradise, will not fall into sin. These truths are not to be seen with the [natural] eyes, but only with the eyes of the mind: if they are not meditated on, they vanish from the mind and then the pleasures of the senses present themselves, and those who do not keep before themselves the eternal truths are easily taken up by them; and this is the reason why so many abandon themselves to vice, and are damned. All Christians know and believe that all must die, and that we shall all be judged; but because they do not think about this, they live far from God. With-

[1] "Violenti rapiunt illud."—*Matt.* xi. 12.

[2] "Memorare novissima tua, et in æternum non peccabis."—*Ecclus.* vii. 40.

out mental prayer there is no light; we walk in the dark; and walking in the dark, we do not see the danger which we are in, we do not make use of the means we ought, nor pray to God to help us, and so we are lost. Without prayer we have neither light nor strength to advance in the ways of God; because without prayer we do not ask God to give us his grace, and without so praying we shall certainly fall. It was for this reason that Cardinal Bellarmine declared it to be morally impossible for a Christian who does not meditate to persevere in the grace of God. Whereas he who makes his meditation every day can scarcely fall into sin; and if unhappily he should fall on some occasion, by continuing his prayer he will return immediately to God. It was said by a servant of God, that "mental prayer and mortal sin cannot exist together." Resolve, then, to make every day, either in the morning or in the evening,—but it is best in the morning,—half an hour's meditation. In the following chapter you will see briefly explained an easy method for making this prayer. For the rest, it is sufficient that during that time you should recollect yourself by reading some book of meditation—either this one or one of the many others; and from time to time excite some good affection or some aspiration, as you will find pointed out in the following chapter. Above all, I beg you never to leave off this prayer, which you should practise at least once a day, although you may be in great aridity, and should feel great weariness in performing it. If you do not discontinue it, you will certainly be saved.

Together with prayer, it is of great use to make a spiritual reading, in private, out of some book which treats of the life of a saint or of the Christian virtues, during half, or at least a quarter of an hour. How many by reading a pious book have changed their way of living and become saints! Like St. John Colombino, St.

Ignatius Loyola, and so many others. It would also be a most useful thing if you were every year to make a retreat in some religious house. But at least do not omit your daily meditation.

3. The Frequentation of the Sacraments.

The third means is *the frequenting of the sacraments of confession and of Communion.* By confession the soul keeps itself purified; and by it it not only obtains remission of sins, but also greater strength to resist temptations. For this purpose you should choose a director, and always confess to the same, consulting him on all more important matters, even temporal ones; and obey him in everything, especially if you are distressed by scruples. He who obeys his confessor need not fear to go astray: *He that heareth you, heareth Me.*[1] The voice of the confessor is the voice of God.

Holy Communion is called heavenly bread, because as common bread preserves the life of the body, so Communion preserves the life of the soul: *Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man . . . you shall not have life in you.*[2] On the other hand, to those who often eat this bread eternal life is promised: *If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.*[3] Therefore the Council of Trent calls Holy Communion "the medicine which delivers us from venial sins and preserves us from mortal ones." You should, then, resolve to go to Communion at least once a week, being determined not to give it up for anything in the world; as there is no affair of greater importance than that of your eternal salvation. Indeed, the longer you remain in the world, the greater need you have of assistance,

[1] "Qui vos audit, me audit."—*Luke*, x. 16.

[2] "Nisi manducaveritis carnem Filii hominis, et biberitis ejus sanguinem, non habebitis vitam in vobis."—*John*, vi. 54.

[3] "Si quis manducaverit ex hoc pane, vivet in æternum."—*John*, vi 52.

because your temptations are greater.* To make a good confession, as also a good Communion, see the following chapter, where you will also find the acts which may be made before and after confession and Communion by way of preparation and thanksgiving.

4. To hear Mass.

The fourth means is to *hear Mass* every day. When we attend Mass we give more honor to God than all the angels and saints in heaven can give him, because theirs is the honor of creatures; but in the Mass we offer to God Jesus Christ, who gives him an infinite honor. Read the following chapter, where you will also find a way of hearing Mass with much profit.

5. The Visit to the Most Holy Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin.

The fifth means is to make a visit every day to the Most Holy Sacrament in some church, and to the Divine Mother before some devout image. Jesus Christ dwells on the altars of so many churches in order to dispense graces to all who come to visit him; and thus the souls of those who practise this beautiful devotion receive innumerable benefits from it. At the end of the next chapter you will find the prayer which may be said when visiting the Most Holy Sacrament, and the Divine Mother. The graces you ought especially to ask for, both from Jesus and Mary, are, the love of God, and holy perseverance till death.

* A certain learned priest wrote three books against the opinion which I had maintained, namely, that a person who desires to keep himself in the grace of God may be allowed to communicate every week, although he may not be purified from the affection to venial sins. On this matter, I beg the reader to read the last answer in my "Moral Instruction," lately printed. (See opuscule entitled "Frequent Communion.")

6. Prayer.

The sixth means which I recommend you above all to put in practice is holy prayer. It is certain that without the divine assistance we can do nothing good for our souls. God also has declared that graces are granted to those only who ask for them: *Ask, and it shall be given you.*[1] Seek, and it shall be given you; therefore, as says St. Teresa, he who seeks not does not receive. Hence it is a common opinion of the holy Fathers, with St. Thomas, that without prayer it is impossible to persevere in the grace of God, and to save one's self. But he who prays is sure of the help of God; we have his word for it, which cannot fail, repeated so often in the sacred Gospels: *All things whatsoever you ask when ye pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you.*[2] *Every one that asketh receiveth.*[3] *Amen, amen, I say unto you, if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you.*[4] God grants everything that we ask him for in the name of Jesus Christ. If, then, we wish to be saved, we must pray, and pray with humility and confidence, and above all with perseverance. And this is the reason why mental prayer is so useful, because then we are reminded to pray; otherwise we forget to do so, and so are lost. St. Teresa says, that out of her desire of seeing every one saved, she would have wished to go to the top of a mountain and then to cry out, so as to be heard by all men, nothing but these words, "Pray! pray!" The ancient Fathers of the desert in their conferences decided that there was no better means of saving our-

[1] "Petite, et dabitur vobis."—*Matt.* vii. 7.

[2] "Omnia quæcumque orantes petitis, credite quia accipietis, et evenient vobis."—*Mark*, xi. 24.

[3] "Omnis enim qui petit, accipit."—*Luke*, xi. 10.

[4] "Amen, amen, dico vobis: si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis."—*John*, xvi. 23.

selves than by continually repeating the prayer of David: *Incline unto my aid, O God! O Lord, make haste to help me!*[1] So let us also try to say. Or else let us make use of the beautiful ejaculation of the Blessed F. Leonard of Porto-Maurice: "My Jesus, mercy!" And the two principal graces which we must always ask for (as I have said before), are the love of God and holy perseverance. We must always ask the same graces from the Most Holy Mary, who is called the dispenser of all the divine graces; and when we pray to her, she will certainly obtain them for us from God. Therefore St. Bernard thus exhorts us: "Let us seek grace, and let us seek it through Mary; for what she seeks she finds, and she cannot be disappointed."[2]

CHAPTER II.

ACTS AND PRACTICES OF PIETY.

§ 1. Acts and Different Prayers on rising in the Morning, and during the Day.

On rising make the sign of the cross, and then say:

My God, I adore Thee and love Thee with all my heart.

I thank Thee for all Thy benefits, and especially for having preserved me this night.

I offer Thee whatever I may do or suffer this day, in union with the actions and sufferings of Jesus and of Mary, with the intention of gaining all the indulgences I can gain.

[1] "Deus, in adjutorium meum intende; Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina."—*Ps.* lxix. 2.

[2] Quæramus gratiam, et per Mariam quæramus; quia, quod quæri invenit, et frustrari non potest.

I resolve to avoid all sin this day, and especially such a one (*it is good to make a resolution, particularly about the fault into which we fall the oftenest*); and I beg of Thee to give me perseverance for the love of Jesus Christ.

I resolve to conform myself to Thy holy will, and particularly in those things that are contrary to my inclination, saying always: Lord, Thy will be done.

My Jesus! keep Thy hand over me this day. Most Holy Mary! take me beneath thy mantle. And do Thou, Eternal Father, help me, for the love of Jesus and Mary! O my angel guardian and my patron saints, assist me. An *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary* and the *Creed*, with three *Hail Marys* in honor of the purity of Mary.

When you begin any work or study, say: Lord! I offer Thee this work. *When you eat:* My God, bless this food and me, that I may commit no fault about it; and may all be for Thy glory. *After having eaten:* I thank Thee, Lord! for having done good to one who was Thy enemy *When the clock strikes:* My Jesus! I love Thee: never permit me to offend Thee again, and let me never be separated from Thee. *In adverse circumstances:* Lord, since Thou hast so willed it, I will it also. *In time of temptation often repeat:* Jesus and Mary! *When you know or doubt of some fault or sin you have committed, say immediately:* My God! I repent of having offended Thee, O Infinite Goodness! I will do so no more. *And if it was a grievous sin, confess it at once.*

It would be a good thing for parents and masters and mistresses to make the children and those under them learn these acts by heart, that they may use them afterwards throughout life.

§ 2. Method of making Mental Prayer.

Mental prayer consists of three parts; the *preparation*, the *meditation*, and the *conclusion*. The *preparation* consists of three acts: one of *faith* in the presence of God; *of humility*, with a short act of contrition; and of *prayer*

to be enlightened: saying as follows, for the first: *My God, I believe that Thou art present with me, and I adore Thee with all the affection of my soul.* For the second: *O Lord, by my sins I deserve to be now in hell; I repent, O Infinite Goodness! with my whole heart, of having offended Thee.* For the third: *My God, for the love of Jesus and Mary, give me light in this prayer, that I may profit by it.* Then say a *Hail Mary* to the Most Blessed Virgin, that she may obtain light for us; and a *Glory be to the Father,* to St. Joseph, to your guardian angel, and to your patron saint, for the same end. These acts should be made with attention, but briefly; and then you go on directly to the meditation.

In the *meditation* you can always make use of some book,* at least at the beginning, and stop where you find

* Here it may be well to mention what the Author himself wrote to his religious, in a circular dated February 26, 1771: "I recommend that for the most part the meditation should be made from my books: *The Preparation for Death, Meditation on the Passion, Darts of Fire,* which are in the WAY OF SALVATION; and *Meditations for Advent,* up to the *Octave of Epiphany.* I say this, not in order to put forward my own poor books, but because these meditations are made up of devout affections, and what is of more importance, are full of holy prayer, of which I do not find many in other books. And hence I beg that the second part of the Meditation, consisting of affections and prayers, be always read."

We must observe that Saint Alphonsus makes the practice of mental prayer simple, clear, easy, and not less fruitful. Owing to the method which he teaches, this exercise, indispensable to him who wishes to sanctify himself, is really put within the reach of all. He wishes that every one should learn how to meditate. He earnestly recommends that for this purpose special instructions should be given to the people.

Pope Benedict XIV. grants to those who in a church or elsewhere, either in public or private, shall teach the manner of making mental prayer, as well as to those who attend such instruction, a plenary indulgence once a month, on the day on which they confess and communicate and pray to the intention of the Church; likewise an indulgence of seven years and seven times forty days, each

yourself mostly touched. St. Francis de Sales says that in this we should do as the bees, which settle on a flower as long they find any honey in it, and then pass on to another. It should also be observed, that the fruits to be gained by meditation are three in number: *to make affections*, *to pray*, and *to make resolutions;* and in these consists the profit to be derived from mental prayer. After you have meditated on some eternal truth, and God has spoken to your heart, you must also speak to God; and first, by forming *affections*, be they acts of faith, of thanksgiving, of humility, or of hope; but above all, repeat the acts of love and contrition. St. Thomas says, that every act of love merits for us the grace of God and paradise: "Every act of love merits eternal life."[1] Each act of contrition obtains the same thing. Acts of love are such as these: *My God, I love Thee above all things! I love Thee with all my heart! I desire to do Thy will in all things. I rejoice that Thou art infinitely happy!* and the like. For an act of contrition it is enough to say: *O Infinite Goodness, I repent of having offended Thee!*

In the second place, you must *pray;* ask God to enlighten you, to give you humility or other virtues, to grant you a good death and eternal salvation; but above all, his love and holy perseverance. And when the soul is in great aridity, it is sufficient to repeat: *My God, help me! Lord, have mercy on me! My Jesus, have mercy!* and if you do nothing but this, your prayer will succeed exceedingly well.

In the third place, before finishing your prayer, you must form a particular resolution; as, for instance, to

time when, having been truly contrite, and having communicated, they teach mental prayer or attend an explanation that is given to learn how to make it. These indulgences are applicable to the souls in purgatory.—Ed.

[1] "Quilibet actus charitatis meretur vitam æternam."—1, 2, q. 114, a. 7, ad 3.

avoid some occasion of sin, to bear with an annoyance from some person, to correct some fault, and the like.

Finally, in the *conclusion*, three acts are to be made: in the 1st, we must thank God for the inspirations we have received; in the 2d, we must make a determination to observe the resolutions we have made; in the 3d, we must ask God, for the love of Jesus and Mary, to help us to keep our resolution. The prayer concludes by the recommendation of the souls in purgatory, the prelates of the Church, sinners, and all our relatives and friends, for which we may say an *Our Father* and a *Hail Mary*. St. Francis of Sales exhorts us to choose some thought which may have struck us more especially in our prayer, that we may remember it during the rest of the day.

Benedict XIV. granted seven years' indulgence to those who make half or at least a quarter of an hour's mental prayer during the day, and a plenary indulgence if it is made every day for a month, on the condition of confession and Communion.

§ 3. Acts to be made by Way of Preparation and Thanksgiving both for Confession and Communion.

Before confessing, the penitent should beg for light from God to enable him to know what sins he has committed, and to obtain the grace of a true sorrow and purpose of amendment. He should also particularly recommend himself to Our Lady of Sorrows, that she may obtain contrition for him. Then he may make the following acts:

Act before Confession.

O God of infinite majesty, behold at Thy feet a traitor, who has offended Thee over and over again, but who now humbly seeks forgiveness. O Lord, reject me not; Thou dost not despise a heart that humbles itself: *A contrite and humbled heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*[1] I thank Thee that Thou hast waited for me till now, and hast not let me die in sin, casting me into hell, as I de-

[1] "Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies."—*Ps.* l. 19.

served. Since Thou hast waited for me, my God, I hope that, by the merits of Jesus Christ, Thou wilt pardon me in this confession for all the offences I have committed against Thee; I repent, and am sorry for them, because by them I have merited hell and lost paradise. But above all, it is not so much on account of hell which I have merited, but because I have offended Thee, O Infinite Goodness! that I am sorry from the bottom of my heart. I love Thee, O Sovereign Good! and because I love Thee, I repent of all the insults I have offered Thee. I have turned my back upon Thee; I have not respected Thee; I have despised Thy grace and Thy friendship. O Lord! I have lost Thee by my own free-will; forgive me all my sins for the love of Jesus Christ, now that I repent with all my heart; I hate, detest, and abominate them above every evil. And I repent not only of mortal sins, but also of venial sins, because these are also displeasing to Thee. I resolve for the future, by Thy grace, never more wilfully to offend Thee. Yes, my God, I will rather die than ever sin again.

And if a person confesses a sin into which he has often relapsed, it is a good thing to resolve particularly not to fall into it again, by promising to avoid the occasion of it, and to take the means pointed out by the confessor, or such as he may himself judge to be most efficacious for correcting himself of it.

Act after Confession.

My dear Jesus! how much do I not owe Thee. By the merits of Thy blood I hope that I have this day been pardoned. I thank Thee above all things. I hope to reach heaven, where I shall praise Thy mercies forever. My God, if I have hitherto lost Thee so often, I now desire to lose Thee no more. From this day forward I will change my life in earnest. Thou dost merit all my love; I will love Thee truly; I will no longer see myself separated from Thee. I have promised Thee this

already; now I repeat my promise of being ready to die rather than offend Thee again. I promise also to avoid all occasions of sin, and to use such means as will prevent me from falling again. My Jesus, Thou knowest my weakness: give me grace to be faithful to Thee till death, and to have recourse to Thee when I am tempted. Most holy Mary, help me! Thou art the mother of perseverance; I place my hope in thee.

Preparation for Communion.

There is no means more efficacious in freeing us from our sins, and in enabling us to advance in the love of God, than Holy Communion. Why is it, then, that some souls find themselves always in the same tepidity, and committing the same faults, notwithstanding the many Communions they make? This happens through the want of a proper disposition and preparation. Two things are requisite for this preparation. The first is to disengage our heart from all affections which are an impediment to the divine love. The second is to have a great desire to love God. And this, says St. Francis de Sales, should be our chief intention when we communicate, namely, to increase in divine love. Out of love alone, says the saint, ought our God to be received, who out of love alone gives himself to us. For this end let us make the following acts.

Acts before Communion.

My beloved Jesus, true Son of God, who didst die for me on the cross in a sea of sorrow and ignominy, I firmly believe that Thou art present in the Most Holy Sacrament; and for this faith I am ready to give my life.

My dear Redeemer, I hope by Thy goodness, and through the merits of Thy blood, that when Thou dost come to me this morning, Thou wilt inflame me with Thy holy love, and wilt give me all those graces which I need to keep me obedient and faithful to Thee till death.

Ah, my God! true and only lover of my soul, what couldst Thou do more to oblige me to love Thee? Thou wert not satisfied, my love, with dying for me, but Thou

wouldst also institute the Most Holy Sacrament, making Thyself my food, and giving Thyself all to me; thus uniting Thyself most closely to such a miserable and ungrateful creature. Thou dost Thyself invite me to receive Thee, and dost greatly desire that I should receive Thee. O infinite Love! A God gives himself all to me! O my God, O infinite love, worthy of infinite love, I love Thee above all things; I love Thee with all my heart; I love Thee more than myself, more than my life; I love Thee because Thou art worthy of being loved; and I love Thee also to please Thee, since Thou dost desire my love! Depart from my soul, all ye earthly affections; to Thee alone, my Jesus, my treasure, my all, will I give all my love. This morning Thou dost give Thyself all to me, and I give myself all to Thee. Permit me to love Thee; for I desire none but Thee, and nothing but what is pleasing to Thee. I love Thee, O my Saviour, and I unite my poor love to the love of all the angels and saints, and of Thy Mother Mary, and the love of Thy Eternal Father! Oh, that I could see Thee loved by all! Oh, that I could make Thee loved by all men, and loved as much as Thou dost deserve!

Behold, O my Jesus, I am now about to draw near to feed on Thy most sacred Flesh! Ah, my God, who am I? and who art Thou? Thou art a Lord of infinite goodness, and I am a loathsome worm, defiled by so many sins, and who have driven Thee out of my soul so often.

Domine, non sum dignus. Lord, I am not worthy to remain in Thy presence; I ought to be in hell forever, far away, and abandoned by Thee. But out of Thy goodness Thou callest me to receive Thee: behold, I come, I come humbled and in confusion for the great displeasure I have given Thee, but trusting entirely to Thy mercy and to the love Thou hast for me. I am exceedingly sorry, O my loving Redeemer, for having so often offended

Thee in time past! Thou didst even give Thy life for me; and I have so often despised Thy grace and Thy love, and have exchanged Thee for nothing. I repent, and am sorry with all my heart for every offence which I have offered Thee, whether grievous or light, because it was an offence against Thee, who art infinite goodness. I hope Thou hast already pardoned me; but if Thou hast not yet forgiven me, pardon me, my Jesus, before I receive Thee. Ah, receive me quickly into Thy grace, since it is Thy will soon to come and dwell within me.

Come, then, my Jesus, come into my soul, that sighs after Thee. My only and infinite good, my life, my love, my all, I would desire to receive Thee this morning with the same love with which those souls who love Thee most have received Thee, and with the same fervor with which Thy Most Holy Mother received Thee; to her Communions I wish to unite this one of mine. O Blessed Virgin, and my Mother Mary, give me Thy Son; I intend to receive him from thy hands! Tell him that I am thy servant, and thus will he press me more lovingly to his heart now that he is coming to me.

Acts after Communion.

The time after Communion is a precious time for gaining treasures of grace, because the acts and prayers made whilst the soul is thus united with Jesus Christ have more merit, and are of more value, than when they are made at any other time. St. Teresa says that our Lord then dwells in the soul enthroned as on a mercy-seat, and speaks to it in these words: My child, ask of me what you will; for this end am I come to you to do you good. Oh, what great favors do those receive who converse with Jesus Christ after Communion! The Ven. F. Avila never omitted to remain two hours in prayer after Communion; and St. Aloysius Gonzaga continued his thanksgiving for three days. Let the communicant, then, make the following acts, and try during the rest of the day to go on making acts of love and prayer, in order to keep himself united with Jesus Christ, whom he has received in the morning.

Behold, my Jesus, Thou art come, Thou art now within me, and hast made Thyself all mine. Be Thou welcome, my Beloved Redeemer. I adore Thee, and cast myself at Thy feet; I embrace Thee, I press Thee to my heart, and thank Thee for that Thou hast deigned to enter into my breast. O Mary, O my patron saints, O my guardian angel, do you all thank him for me! Since then, O my Divine King! Thou art come to visit me with so much love, I give Thee my will, my liberty, and my whole self. Thou hast given Thyself all to me, I will give myself all to Thee; I will no longer belong to myself; from this day forward I will be Thine, and altogether Thine. I desire that my soul, my body, my faculties, my senses, should be all Thine, that they may be employed in serving and pleasing Thee. To Thee I consecrate all my thoughts, my desires, my affections, and all my life. I have offended Thee enough, my Jesus; I desire to spend the remainder of my life in loving Thee, who hast loved me so much.

Accept, O God of my soul, the sacrifice which I, a miserable sinner, make to Thee, and who desires only to love and please Thee. Work Thou in me, and dispose of me, and of all things belonging to me, as Thou pleasest. May Thy love destroy in me all those affections which are displeasing to Thee, that I may be all Thine, and may live only to please Thee!

I ask Thee not for goods of this world, for pleasures, for honors; give me, I pray Thee, by the merits of Thy Passion, O my Jesus, a constant sorrow for my sins! Enlighten me, and make me know the vanity of worldly goods, and how much Thou dost deserve to be loved. Separate me from all attachment to the world, and bind me entirely to Thy love, that from henceforth my will may neither seek nor desire anything but what Thou willest. Give me patience and resignation in infirmities, in poverty, and in all those things which are contrary to

my self-love. Make me gentle towards those who despise me. Give me a holy death. Give me Thy holy love. And, above all, I pray Thee to give me perseverance in Thy grace till death; never permit me to separate myself from Thee again: *Jesu dulcissime, ne permittas me separari a Te.* And I also ask of Thee the grace always to have recourse to Thee, and to invoke Thy aid, O my Jesus, in all my temptations; and the grace to ask Thee always for holy perseverance.

O Eternal Father, Thy Son Jesus Christ has promised me that Thou wilt grant me everything that I shall ask Thee in his name: *If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you.*[1] In the name, therefore, and by the merits of this Son, I ask for Thy love and holy perseverance, that I may one day love Thee in heaven with all my strength, and sing Thy mercies forever, secure of never more being separated from Thee.

O most holy Mary, my mother and my hope, obtain for me these graces which I so desire; as also a great love for thee, my Queen: may I always recommend myself to thee in all my necessities!

§ 4. Method of hearing Mass.

The same action is performed in the Mass as was accomplished on Calvary, except that there the blood of Jesus Christ was really shed, while on the altar it is shed mystically; but in the Mass the merits of the Passion of Jesus are applied to each one in particular. To hear Mass, therefore, with great fruit, we must pay attention to the ends for which it was instituted, namely: 1. To honor God. 2. To thank him for his benefits. 3. To satisfy for our sins. 4. To obtain graces. For this reason you may use the following prayer during Mass.*

[1] "Si quid petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, dabit vobis."—*John*, xvi. 23.

* Saint Alphonsus speaks here only of the two essential or principal points. "To satisfy the obligation of hearing Mass," he elsewhere says, "two things are necessary—an *intention* and *attention*. It is

Eternal Father, in this Sacrifice I offer to Thee Thy Son Jesus, with all the merits of his Passion: 1. In honor of Thy majesty. 2. In thanksgiving for all the favors Thou hast hitherto shown me, and for all those which I hope to receive for all eternity. 3. In satisfaction for my sins, and for those of all the living and dead. 4. To obtain eternal salvation, and all the graces that are necessary for me to gain it.

At the elevation of the Host: My God, for the love of this Thy Son, pardon me and give me holy perseverance. *At the elevation of the Chalice:* By the Blood of Jesus, give me Thy love and a holy death. *At the Communion of the priest make a spiritual Communion saying:* My Jesus, I love Thee, and desire to possess Thee. I embrace Thee, and I will never more separate myself from Thee.

§ 5. Acts to be made in Visiting the Most Holy Sacrament and the Divine Mother.

My Lord Jesus Christ, who, for the love Thou bearest to mankind, dost remain night and day in this Sacrament, full of pity and love, awaiting, calling, and receiving all who come to visit Thee; I believe that Thou art present in the Sacrament of the Altar; I adore Thee from the depths of my own nothingness; I thank Thee for the many graces Thou hast given me, and especially for having given me Thyself in this Saracment; for having given me Mary Thy Mother as my advocate, and for having called me to visit Thee in this church. I salute Thy most amiable and most loving heart; and I do so,

certain that those attending Mass offer the Holy Sacrifice with the priest. Think, therefore, of the great action which you perform. Meditate on the Passion of Jesus Christ, the Last Things, etc. If you prefer, read some spiritual book, or recite either the Office of the Blessed Virgin, or the Rosary, or other prayers. But at least pay attention to what the priest does." (Instr. on the Commandments, chap. 3.—Ed.)

first, in thanksgiving for this great gift; secondly, to atone for all the insults Thou hast received in this Sacrament from all infidels, heretics, and bad Catholics; thirdly, I intend in this visit to adore Thee in all those places where Thou, thus veiled in the Most Holy Sacrament, art least reverenced and most abandoned. My Jesus, I love Thee with my whole heart. I am sorry that I have hitherto so often offended Thy infinite goodness. With the help of Thy grace, I resolve to displease Thee no more; and, unworthy as I am, I now consecrate myself wholly to Thee; I renounce and give to Thee my will, my affections, my desires, and all that is mine. Henceforward do with me, and all that belongs to me, whatsoever Thou pleasest. I ask for nothing but Thee and Thy holy love, final perseverance, and a perfect fulfilment of Thy will. I recommend to Thee the souls in purgatory, especially those who were most devout to this Most Holy Sacrament, and to Most Holy Mary. I also recommend to Thee all poor sinners. And lastly, my beloved Saviour, I unite all my affections to those of Thy most loving heart; and thus united, I offer them to Thy Eternal Father; and in Thy name I beseech him to accept and grant them.

While Visiting any Image of the Ever-Blessed Virgin.

Most holy immaculate Virgin Mary, my Mother, I, the most miserable of sinners, have this day recourse to thee, the Mother of my Lord, the Queen of the universe, the advocate, the hope, the refuge of sinners! I worship thee, O great Queen, and I thank thee for the many favors thou hast hitherto obtained for me; especially for having delivered me from Hell, which I have so often deserved. I love thee, O most amiable Lady, worthy of all love! and for the love I bear thee, I promise to serve thee always, and to do everything in my power to make others serve thee also. In thee do I hope; I place my salvation in thy

hands. Accept me for thy servant, receive me under thy mantle, O Mother of Mercy! Thou art all-powerful with God; free me, then, from all temptations, or at least obtain for me strength to conquer them as long as I live. From thee I beg a true love of Jesus Christ; and by thy help I hope for a good death. I beseech thee, Mother, by the love thou bearest to God, that thou wilt always help me, but especially at the last moment of my life. Leave me not till thou shalt see me safe in heaven, blessing thee, and singing thy mercies for all eternity. Amen. This is my hope. So may it be!

§ 6. Christian Acts, to be made in the Evening before going to Bed.

Before going to rest, make your examination of conscience in the following manner: First thank God for all the favors you have received; then cast a glance over all the actions you have done and the words you have spoken during the day, repenting of all the faults you have committed. Afterwards make the Christian acts in the following manner:

Act of Faith.

O my God, who art infallible truth, because Thou hast revealed it to Thy Church, I believe all that she proposes to my belief! I believe that Thou art my God, the Creator of all things; that Thou dost reward the just with an eternal paradise, and dost punish the wicked in hell for all eternity. I believe that Thou art one in essence, and three in persons, namely, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. I believe in the Incarnation and death of Jesus Christ. I believe, in fine, all that the Holy Church believes. I thank Thee for having made me a Christian; and I protest that I will live and die in this holy faith.

Act of Hope.

O my God, confiding in Thy promises, because Thou art powerful, faithful, and merciful, I hope through the

merits of Jesus Christ to obtain pardon of my sins, final perseverance, and the glory of paradise.

Act of Love and Contrition.

O my God, because Thou art infinite goodness, worthy of infinite love, I love Thee with all my heart above all things; and for the love of Thee I love my neighbor also. I repent with all my heart, and am sorry above all things for all my sins, because by them I have offended Thy infinite goodness. I resolve, by the help of Thy grace, which I beseech Thee to grant me now and always, rather to die than ever to offend Thee again. I purpose, also, to receive the holy Sacraments during my life, and at the hour of my death.

It is well to know, that to those who make these Christian acts with the desire of receiving the holy Sacraments during their life and at their death Benedict XIII. granted seven years' indulgence; and a plenary indulgence, applicable to the souls in purgatory, when they are said regularly for a month; as also a plenary indulgence in *articulo mortis*—at the hour of death. Besides, by a concession of Benedict XIV., the indulgence may be gained several times a day by any one who recites the above acts, provided he does so with the intention of gaining the indulgence.

Conclude the whole by saying the Rosary and the litany of the Blessed Virgin.

§ 7. Devout Prayers to Jesus and Mary to obtain the Graces necessary for Salvation.

Prayer to Jesus Christ, to obtain His Holy Love.

My crucified Jesus, I confess Thee to be the true Son of God and my Saviour. I adore and thank Thee for the death Thou didst suffer for me. My dear Redeemer, if I have hitherto done nothing but offend Thee, I am now sorry for it above all things, and I desire nothing but to love Thee. Thou hast promised to hear those who pray to Thee; by the merits of Thy Passion, I ask Thee to give me Thy holy love. Ah, draw my heart entirely to

Thyself, that from this day forward I may love Thee with all my strength, and may love none other but Thee; and so may I one day come to love Thee for all eternity in paradise.

Prayer to obtain Final Perseverance.

O sovereign and eternal God, I thank Thee for having created me; for having redeemed me by means of Jesus Christ; for having made me a Christian by calling me to the true faith, and giving me time to repent after the many sins I have committed. O Infinite Goodness, I love Thee above all things; and I repent with all my heart of all my offences against Thee. I hope Thou hast already pardoned me; but I am continually in danger of again offending Thee. For the love of Jesus Christ, I beg of Thee holy perseverance till death. Thou knowest my weakness; help me, then, and permit me never again to separate myself from Thee. Rather let me die a thousand times, than ever again to lose Thy grace. O Mary, my Mother, obtain for me holy perseverance!

Prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary for every Day in the Week.

SUNDAY.

To obtain the Pardon of Sins.

Behold at thy feet, O mother of God! a miserable sinner, who has recourse to thee, and places his confidence in thee. O Mother of mercy, have pity on me. Thou art the refuge, the hope of sinners; thou art, therefore, my refuge and my hope. Thou hast it in thy power to save me by thy holy intercession; succor me for the love of Jesus Christ, stretch forth thy hand to a fallen sinner who commends himself to thee. I know that thou delightest to assist a poor sinner; assist me therefore now that thou hast it in thy power to assist me. I have forfeited divine grace and lost my soul by my sins; I now

put myself into thy hands; tell me what I must do to regain the grace of my Lord, for I am willing to do all that thou shalt direct me. To thee then do I have recourse. Thou prayest for many others, pray also to Jesus for me; ask him to pardon me, and he will pardon me; tell him that thou desirest my salvation and he will save me. Manifest the good which thou art able to accomplish in behalf of those who confide in thee. This is my hope. Amen.

MONDAY.

To obtain Holy Perseverance.

O Queen of heaven, I dedicate myself to thee to be thy perpetual servant, and I offer myself to serve thee during my whole life; accept of me, and do not reject me as I have deserved. O mother, in thee do I place all my hopes. I bless and thank God, that, in his mercy, he has given me this confidence in thee, which I hold as a great earnest of my salvation. Ah, how have I hitherto miserably fallen, because I have not had recourse to thee! I now hope, through the merits of Jesus and thy prayers, that I have been pardoned; but I may again fall and forfeit divine grace. Most blessed Lady, protect me, and suffer me not to become any more the slave of the devil; always assist me; I know that thou wilt assist me, and I shall conquer with thy assistance, if I recommend myself to thee; but of this I am not afraid: I am afraid that when in danger of falling I may not call upon thee, and may perish. This favor I ask of thee, that in all the assaults of the devil I may always have recourse to thee, saying, Mary, help me; help me, Mary, most holy mother; do not suffer me to lose God.

TUESDAY.

To obtain a Happy Death.

O Mary! what will my death be? Considering my sins, and reflecting on that awful moment, when I must breathe my last and be judged, I tremble and am confounded. Most holy Mother, in the blood of Jesus and in thy prayers are placed my hopes. O consolation of the afflicted, do not abandon me then; fail not to console me in that great affliction. If thou assist me not I shall be lost. Ah, blessed Lady! before my death be at hand, obtain for me a great sorrow for my sins, a real amendment of life and fidelity to God, during the remainder of my days. And when I shall arrive at the end of my life, O Mary, my hope, assist me in that distressing moment, and so comfort me that I may not fall into despair at the sight of my sins, which the devil will place before me. Grant that I may invoke thee then more frequently, and that I may expire with thy name on my tongue and the name of thy most holy and divine Son. O blessed Lady, pardon my assurance; but before I die, do thou in person come to console me with thy presence. I am a sinner, it is true, and do not deserve such a favor; but I am devoted to thee, I love thee, and have great confidence in thee. O Mary, I look for thee; let me not remain disconsolate. At least, if I be not then worthy of so great a favor, assist me from heaven, that I may depart from this life loving God and thee, to come to love thee eternally in heaven.

WEDNESDAY.

To escape Hell.

Most dear and blessed Lady, I thank thee for having so often preserved me from falling into hell, which I have deserved by my repeated sins. Alas! there was a time

when I must have stood condemned to that dreadful prison; and it may be that on my first committing sin the sentence would have been executed upon me had not thou in thy pity assisted me. Although I did not pray to thee, yet, through thy goodness alone, thou didst restrain divine justice; and conquering the hardness of my heart, induce me to place my confidence in thee. And oh! into how many more sins should I have fallen, to the dangers of which I was exposed, hadst not thou, my most affectionate Mother, preserved me from them by the graces which thou didst obtain for me! O holy Queen, continue, I beseech Thee, to preserve me from hell. If at one time I did not love thee, now, next to God, I love thee above all things. Never suffer me to turn my back upon thee, and upon God, who through thy means hast bestowed so many mercies upon me. Most amiable Lady, suffer me not to have to curse thee for all eternity in hell. Couldst thou endure to see one lost who is thy servant and loves thee? Most Blessed Virgin, since thou hast done so much to save me, accomplish thy work, and continue to assist me. But if thou, when I lived forgetful of thee, didst so favor me, what may I not expect from thee now that I love thee and recommend myself to thee! No, no one can be lost who recommends himself to thee. O my Mother, leave me not to myself, that I may be lost; grant that I may always have recourse to thee. Save me, my hope, by thy powerful intercession; save me from hell; and first save me from sin, which alone can condemn me to hell.

THURSDAY.

To obtain Heaven.

O Queen of heaven, who sittest above all the choirs of angelic spirits nearest to the throne of God, from this valley of tears I salute thee, miserable sinner as I am.

and beseech thee to turn towards me those eyes of mercy which distribute favors whithersoever thou directest them. Behold, O Mary! to how many dangers I am now exposed, and must remain exposed so long as I continue in this world, of losing my soul, heaven, and God. In thee, O blessed Lady! next to God, are placed all my hopes. I love thee, and long to approach and behold and praise thee in heaven. O Mary! when will the day come when I shall see myself saved at thy feet, and shall behold thee the mother of my Lord, and my mother also, who hast taken such pains to save me! O blessed Lady! I have been very ungrateful to thee during my life; but if I gain heaven, I shall not be any more ungrateful to thee: then shall I love thee as much as I am able for all eternity, and shall make amends for my past neglect by blessing thee and thanking thee forever. I give sovereign thanks to God for having given me so great confidence in the blood of Jesus, and in thee, as to hope that thou wilt deliver me from my sins, and obtain for me light and strength to accomplish the divine will, and finally conduct me to the gates of paradise. Thy servants have very much hoped in thee, and none have been deceived; nor shall I be deceived. O Mary! thou desirest nothing else in my regard; thou wilt save me. Pray to thy Son Jesus (as I now beseech him through the merits of his bitter Passion) to preserve and to increase in me more and more this my confidence in thee, and I shall be saved.

FRIDAY.

To obtain Love for Jesus Christ and for Mary.

O Mary! I know that thou art the most noble, the most holy, and the most amiable of all creatures. O blessed Lady! would that all knew thee and loved thee as thou deservest! I am consoled that so many holy souls both in heaven and on earth love thy goodness and beauty.

Above all, I rejoice that God himself loves thee more than all men and angels. Most amiable Queen, I, a miserable sinner, also love thee, but I love thee too little; I desire to obtain a greater and more tender love for thee; obtain this for me: for to love thee is a great sign of predestination, and a grace which God does not grant but to those whom he especially wills to be saved.

I am sensible, O holy Mother! that I am under immense obligations to thy Son, and he is deserving of infinite love. Thou desirest nothing else but to see him loved: to do this is the grace which above all others I beseech thee to obtain for me: obtain for me a great love for Jesus Christ. Thou obtainest from God whatever thou pleasest; oh, then, obtain for me the grace of being so united with the divine will that I may never be separated from it. I ask thee not for the goods of this world, nor for honors, nor riches; I ask thee for what thy heart most desires, that I may love my God. Is it possible that thou shouldst not assist me in obtaining this, which is so pleasing to thee? No; thou wilt assuredly help me, and pray for me. Pray, and cease not to pray, until thou seest me in paradise, safe from all danger of again losing my Lord, and secure of ever loving him, together with thee, my most dear mother.

SATURDAY.

To obtain the Patronage of Mary.

O Most Holy Mother! I am sensible of the graces which thou hast obtained for me, and of the ingratitude with which I have employed them; but notwithstanding this, I will not cease to confide in thy mercy, which is much greater than my ingratitude. O my powerful advocate, have pity on me. Thou art the dispenser of all the graces which God grants to us miserable sinners. For this end has he made thee so powerful, so rich, and

so benign, that thou mayest succor us in our miseries. O Mother of mercy, leave me not in my poverty. Thou art the advocate of the most miserable and abandoned sinners when they have recourse to thee; defend me, therefore, who recommend myself to thee. Say not that my cause is difficult to be gained; whilst the most desperate causes, when entrusted to thee, are always successful. In thy hands, therefore, do I place my eternal salvation, and to thee do I consign my soul, which was lost, but which thou wilt save by thy holy intercession. This is my hope. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRACTICE OF THE CHRISTIAN VIRTUES.

§ 1. The Practice of Humility.

No one can please God without being humble, for he cannot bear the proud. He has promised to hear those who pray to him; but if a proud man prays to him, the Lord hears him not; to the humble, on the contrary, he dispenses his graces: *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*[1] Humility is of two kinds; humility of *affection*, and humility of the *will*. The former consists in the conviction we have of our own wretchedness, so that we can neither know nor do anything but what is evil. All that we have and do that is good comes from God. Let us come now to the practice of humility. With regard, then, to the humility of the affections, first, we must put no confidence in our own strength, nor in our own resolutions; but we must be always diffident and fearful of ourselves: *With fear and*

[1] "Deus superbis resistit; humilibus autem dat gratiam."—*James*, iv. 6.

trembling work out your salvation.[1] St. Philip Neri said: "He who fears not is sure to fall." Secondly, we must not glory in things that belong to us, as in our natural abilities, in our actions, in our birth, in our relatives, and the like. It is therefore well never to speak of our actions, except to point out where we have been wrong. And it is better not to speak of ourselves at all, either for good or bad; because, even when we blame ourselves, it is often an occasion of vain-glory, by making us think that we shall be praised, or at least be considered humble, and thus humility becomes pride. Thirdly, let us not be angry with ourselves after we have committed a fault. That would not be humility, but pride; and it is even a device of the devil to take away all our confidence, and make us leave off following a good life. When we see that we have fallen, we should say with St. Catharine of Genoa: "Lord, these are the fruits of my own garden." Then let us humble ourselves, and rise up immediately from the fault we have committed by an act of love and contrition, resolving not to fall into the same fault again, and trusting in the help of God. And if we unhappily do fall again, we must always do the same. Fourthly, when we see others fall, we are not to wonder; rather let us compassionate them; and let us thank God, praying him to keep his hand over us; otherwise the Lord will punish us by permitting us to fall into the same sins, and perhaps worse. Fifthly, we must always consider ourselves as the greatest sinners in the world; even when we know that others have sinned more than we; because our sins having been committed after we had received so many favors, and had been enlightened by so many graces, will be more displeasing to God than the faults of others, though they may be more numerous. St. Teresa writes that we must not think

[1] "Cum metu et tremore vestram salutem operamini."—*Phil.* ii. 12.

we have made any progress in the way of perfection if we do not esteem ourselves worse than every one else, and desire to be considered the last of all.

The humility of the *will* consists in being pleased when we are despised by others. Any one who has deserved hell, deserves to be trodden under foot by the devils forever. Jesus Christ desires that we should learn of him to be meek and humble of heart: *Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.*[1] Many are humble in word, but not in heart. They say: "I am worse than all: I deserve a thousand hells." But when any one reproves them, or says a word that displeases them, they immedi ately take umbrage. They are like hedgehogs, which put out their bristles as soon as they are touched. But how is it—you say you are worse than all, and yet you cannot bear a word? "He who is truly humble," says St. Bernard, "esteems himself good for nothing, and desires to be considered good for nothing by others as well."

In the first place, then, if you wish to be truly humble, when you receive an admonition, receive it in good part, and thank the person who admonishes you. St. Chrysostom says, "When the just man is corrected, he is sorry for the error he has committed; but the proud man is sorry that the error should be known." The saints, when they are accused, even wrongfully, do not justify themselves, except when to defend themselves is necessary to avoid giving scandal: otherwise they are silent, and offer all to God.

In the second place, when you receive any affront, suffer it patiently, and increase in love towards the person who has ill-treated you. This is the touchstone by which you may know whether a person is humble and holy. If he resents an injury, even though he may work mira-

[1] "Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde."—*Matt.* xi. 29.

cles, you may say that he is an empty reed. Father Balthazar Alvarez said that the time of humiliation is the time to gain treasures of merits. You will gain more by peaceably suffering contempt, than you could do by fasting ten days on bread and water. Humiliations which we inflict on ourselves are good; but those which we accept from the hands of others are worth much more, because in these last there is less of self and more of God; therefore, when we know how to bear them the merit is greater. But what can a Christian pretend to do if he cannot bear to be despised for the sake of God? How much contempt did not Jesus Christ suffer for us! Buffetings, derisions, scourging, and spitting in his face! Ah! if we loved Jesus Christ, not only should we not show resentment for injuries, but we should rejoice at seeing ourselves despised as Jesus Christ was despised.

§ 2. The Practice of Mortification.

If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.[1] This is all that any one who wishes to be a follower of Jesus Christ has to do. The denying of one's self is the mortification of self-love. Do we wish to be saved? We must then conquer all to make sure of all. How miserable is the soul that allows itself to be guided by self-love! Mortification is of two kinds—*internal* and *external:* by interior mortification we have to study to conquer our passions, and especially our most predominant one. A person who does not overcome his predominant passion is in great danger of being lost; whereas he who has overcome that will easily conquer all the others. Some, however, allow one vice to predominate in themselves, and think that they are good, because they do not see in themselves vices which

[1] "Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me."—*Matt.* xvi. 24.

others have. "But what does it matter?" says St. Cyril: "one leak is sufficient to sink the ship." Nor will it suffice to say, "I cannot abstain from this vice;" a resolute will conquers all; that is, of course, with the assistance of God, who will never fail us.

External mortification has to do with conquering the sensual appetites. Worldly people call the saints cruel when they deny their bodies all satisfaction of the senses and chastise them with hair-shirts, disciplines, and other penances. "But," says St. Bernard, "they are in reality much more cruel to themselves, who condemn themselves to burn forever in hell-fire for the sake of the short and miserable pleasures of this life." Others say that all forbidden pleasures should be denied to the body; but they despise external mortifications, saying, that interior mortification is what is required; that is, the mortification of the will. Yes, it is principally necessary to mortify the will, but the mortification of the flesh is also necessary; because, when the flesh is not mortified, it will be hard to be obedient to God. St. John of the Cross said, that any one who taught that external mortification was not necessary, ought not to be believed, even though he worked miracles. But let us come to the practice of it.

In the first place, the eyes must be mortified. The first arrows which wound the soul, and often kill it, enter through the eyes. The eyes are, as it were, grappling-irons of hell, which drag souls, as if by main force, into sin. A certain Pagan philosopher voluntarily put out his eyes to free himself from impurity. It is not lawful for us to pluck out our eyes, but we ought to make them blind by means of mortification; otherwise we shall find it difficult to keep ourselves chaste. St. Francis de Sales said: "You must close the gates, if you do not wish the enemy to enter into the citadel." We must then abstain from looking at any object that may

give occasion to temptation. St. Aloysius Gonzaga did not dare to raise his eyes to look even at his own mother; and when by chance our eyes light on some dangerous object, let us take care not to fix them on it. "It is not so much the mere seeing," says St. Francis de Sales, "but the inspecting and continuing to look, that is the cause of ruin." Let us then be very careful in mortifying our eyes; because many are now in hell on account of sins committed with the eyes.

In the second place, we must mortify our tongue, by abstaining from words of detraction, or of abuse, or of obscenity. An impure word spoken in conversation, even in jest, may prove a scandal to others, and be the cause of a thousand sins arising from it. And it should be observed, that sometimes a word of double meaning, said in a witty way, does more harm than a word openly impure.

In the third place, we must mortify the taste. St. Andrew Avellini said that, in order to begin to live a good Christian life, a man must begin by the mortification of his palate. And St. Francis de Sales said: "We must eat to live, not live to eat." Many seem to live only to eat, and thus they destroy the health both of their soul and body. For the most part costiveness, diarrhœa, and other illnesses are caused by the vice of gluttony. But the worst is, that intemperance in eating and drinking is often the cause of incontinence. Cassian writes that it is impossible that a man who is satiated with food and heating drinks—as wine, brandy, and the like—should not feel many impure temptations. "But how is this?" says such a one; "must I eat no more?" Yes, my good friend, we must eat to preserve our life, but like rational beings, not as brutes. Especially if you desire to be free from impure temptations, abstain from eating overmuch meat, and from overmuch wine. The

Scripture says: *Give not wine to kings.*[1] By a king is meant one who brings his flesh under the dominion of reason. Much wine makes us lose our reason, and involves not only the vice of drunkenness, which is certainly a mortal sin, but also that of impurity. Regret not having sometimes to fast or to abstain, especially on a Saturday, in honor of the Most Holy Mary. Many do so on bread and water; this you can at least do on the vigils of the seven principal feasts of Our Lady. I pray you to observe at least the fasts of obligation. Some go beyond fifteen or twenty ounces at collation, and say: "It is sufficient if I am not satisfied." No, it is not enough; the most that can be taken on the evenings of fast days of obligation is eight ounces; and even that has grown up by custom; for in olden times food could be taken only once a day.

In the fourth place, we must mortify our hearing and our touch: the hearing, by avoiding listening to immodest and scandalous conversations; the touch, by using all possible caution, as well in regard to others as in regard to ourselves. Some say it is nothing, that they only do it in jest; but who, I ask, would play with fire?

§ 3. The Practice of Charity towards our Neighbor.

He who loves God, loves his neighbor also; but he who loves not his neighbor, neither does he love God; for the divine precept says, *That he who loveth God, loves also his brother.*[2] We must also love our neighbor in heart as well as in deed. And how much are we to love him? Here is the rule: *Love the Lord thy God with thy whole soul, . . . and thy neighbor as thyself.*[3] We must, then, love God above all things and more than our-

[1] "Noli regibus dare vinum."—*Prov.* xxxi. 4.

[2] "Qui diligit Deum, diligat et fratrem suum."—*John*, iv. 21.

[3] "Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo: . . . et proximum tuum sicut teipsum."—*Luke*, x. 27.

selves; and our neighbor as ourselves. So that, as we desire our own good, and take delight in it when we have it, and, on the contrary, are sorry for any evil that may happen to us, so also we must desire our neighbor's good, and rejoice when he obtains it; and, on the other hand, we must be sorry for his misfortunes. So, again, we must neither judge nor suspect evil of our neighbor, without good grounds. And this is what constitutes interior charity.

External charity consists in our words and actions towards our neighbor. As to words, first we must abstain from the least shadow of detraction. A detractor is hateful to God and man. On the contrary, he who speaks well of every one is beloved by God and men; and when the fault cannot be excused, we must at least excuse the intention. Secondly, let us be careful not to repeat to any one the evil that has been said of him by another; because sometimes long enmities and revenge arise from such things. The Scripture says, he who sows discord is hated by God. Thirdly, we must take care not to wound our neighbor, by saying anything that may hurt him; even were it only in jest. Would you like to be laughed at in the same way as you laugh at your neighbor? Fourthly, let us avoid disputes: sometimes on account of a mere trifle quarrels are begun, which end in abuse and rancor. We have also to guard against the spirit of contradiction, which some indulge when they gratuitousiy set themselves to contradict everything. On such occasions give your opinion, and then be quiet. Fifthly, let us speak gently to all, even to our inferiors; therefore let us not make use of imprecations or abuse. And when our neighbor is angry with us, and is somewhat abusive, let us answer meekly, and the quarrel will be at an end: *A mild answer breaketh wrath.*[1] And when we are annoyed by our neighbor.

[1] "Responsio mollis frangit iram."—*Prov.* xv. 1.

we must be careful not to say anything; because our passion will then make us go too far: it will make us exaggerate; but afterwards we shall certainly be sorry for it. St. Francis de Sales says, "I was never angry in my life, that I did not repent of it shortly afterwards." The rule is to be silent as long as we feel ourselves disturbed. And when our neighbor continues to be irritated, let us reserve the correction till another time, even though it should be necessary; because for the moment our words would not convince, and would do no good.

With regard also to the charity of our actions towards our neighbor: first, it is practised by aiding him as we best may. Let us remember what the Scripture says: *For alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness.*[1] Almsgiving, then, saves us from sin and from hell. By alms is understood any assistance which it is in our power to render to our neighbor. The kind of almsgiving which is the most meritorious is to help the soul of our neighbor, by correcting him gently and opportunely, whenever we can. And let not us say with some, "What doth it signify to me?" It does signify to one who is a Christian. He who loves God, wishes to see him loved by all.

Secondly, we must show charity towards the sick, who are in greater need of help. Let us make them some little present, if they are poor. At least let us go and wait on them and comfort them, even though they should not thank us for doing so; the Lord will reward us.

Thirdly, we must above all show charity to our enemies. Some are all kindness with their friends; but Jesus Christ says, *Do good to those that hate you.*[2] By this you may know that a man is a true Christian, if he seeks to do good to those who wish him evil. And if we can

[1] "Eleemosyna ab omni peccato et a morte liberat, et non patietur animam ire in tenebras."—*Tob.* iv. 11.

[2] "Benefacite his qui oderunt vos."—*Matt.* v. 44.

do nothing else for those who persecute us, let us at least pray that God will prosper them, according as Jesus commands us: *Pray for them that persecute you.*[1] This is the way the saints revenged themselves. He who pardons any one who has offended him, is sure of being pardoned by God; since God has given us the promise: *Forgive, and you shall be forgiven.*[2] Our Lord said one day to the Blessed Angela of Foligno, that the surest sign of a soul being loved by God, is when it loves a person who has offended it.

Fourthly, let us also be charitable to our neighbors who are dead, that is, to the holy souls in purgatory. St. Thomas says, that if we are bound to help our neighbors who are alive, we are also bound to remember them when dead. Those holy prisoners are suffering pains which exceed all the sufferings of this life; and nevertheless are in the greatest necessity, since they cannot possibly help themselves. A Cistercian monk once said to the sacristan of his monastery: "Help me, brother, by your prayers, when I can no longer help myself." Let us then endeavor to succor these holy souls, either by having Masses said for them, or by hearing Masses for them, by giving alms, or at least by praying, and applying indulgences in their behalf; they will show themselves grateful by obtaining great graces for us, not only when they reach heaven, if they arrive there sooner through our prayers, but also in purgatory.

§ 4. The Practice of Patience.

St. James says, that patience is the perfect work of a soul: *And patience hath a perfect work.*[3] It is by patience that we gain heaven. This earth is a place where we

[1] "Orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos."—*Matt.* v. 44.
[2] "Dimittite, et dimittemini."—*Luke*, vi. 37.
[3] "Patientia autem opus perfectum habet."—*James*, i. 4.

can gain merit; therefore it is not a place of rest, but of labors and sufferings; and it is for this end that God makes us live here, that by patience we may obtain the glory of paradise. Every one has to suffer in this world; but he who suffers with patience suffers less and saves himself, while he who suffers with impatience suffers more and is damned. Our Lord does not send us crosses that he may see us lost, as some impatient people say, but that we may be thereby saved, and inherit more glory in heaven. Sorrows, contradictions, and all other tribulations, when accepted with patience, become the brightest jewels in our heavenly crown. Whenever, then, we are in affliction, let us console ourselves and thank God for it, since it is a sign that God wishes us to be saved, by chastising us in this life, where the chastisements are but slight and short, so as not to punish us in the next, where the chastisements are cruel and eternal. Woe to the sinner who is prosperous in this life! it is a sign that God has reserved for him eternal punishment.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi said: "All sufferings, however great, become sweet when we look at Jesus on the cross." And St. Joseph Calasanctius: "He who cannot suffer for Jesus Christ, does not know how to gain Jesus Christ for his own." He, then, who loves Jesus Christ bears patiently all external crosses—sickness, pains, dishonor, loss of parents and friends; and all interior crosses—afflictions, weariness, temptations, and desolation of spirit, and he bears them all in peace. On the other hand, he who is impatient and angry when he is in tribulation, what does he do? He does but increase his suffering, and adds to his punishments in the next life. St. Teresa says in her writings: "The cross is felt by those who drag it after them by force; but he who embraces it with a good will does not feel it." Hence St. Philip Neri also said: "In this world there is no purgatory; it is either heaven or hell: he who bears tribu-

lation with patience is in heaven, but he who does not, is in hell." Let us proceed to the practice.

First, patience must be practised in sickness. The time of sickness is a time for testing the devotion of people, whether it is of lead or of gold. Some are pious and cheerful when they are in good health; but when they are visited by any illness, they lose their patience, complain of everything, and give themselves up to melancholy, and commit a thousand other faults. Their gold turns out to be lead. St. Joseph Calasanctius said: "If sick people were patient, we should hear no more complaints." Some complain and say: "But as long as I am in this state, I cannot go to church, nor to Communion, nor to Mass; in short, I can do nothing." You say you can do nothing. You do everything when you do the will of God. Tell me, why do you want to do those things you have named? Is it to please God? This is the good pleasure of God, that you should embrace with patience all you have to endure, and should leave everything else that you wish to do alone. "God is served," writes St. Francis de Sales, "more by suffering than by any other works we can do."

If our sickness be dangerous, then especially must we accept it with all patience, being willing to die should the end of our life be really at hand. Nor should we say: "But I am not now prepared; I should like to live a little longer to do penance for my sins." And how do you know that if you were to live on you would do penance, and would not fall into greater sins? How many there are who, after recovering from some mortal illness, have become worse than they were before, and have been lost; while, perhaps, if they had died then, they would have been saved! If it is the will of God that you should leave this world, unite yourself to his holy will, and thank him for allowing you the help of the holy Sacraments, and accept death with tranquillity, abandoning

yourself into the arms of his mercy. This compliance with the divine will, by accepting death, will be sufficient to insure your eternal salvation.

In the second place, we must accept also with patience the death of our relatives and friends. Some on the death of a relative are so inconsolable, that they leave off saying their prayers, frequenting the sacraments, and all their devotions. Such a one goes so far as even to be angry with God, and to say: "Lord, why hast Thou done this?" What rashness is this! Tell me, what does all your grief profit you? Do you perhaps think to do pleasure to the dead person? No; what you are doing is displeasing to him as well as to God. He desires that, with regard to his death, you should become more united with God, and should pray for him if he is in purgatory.

In the third place, let us accept the poverty which God sends us. When you are in want even of the necessaries of life, say: "My God, Thou alone art sufficient for me." One such act will gain treasures for us in paradise. He who possesses God has every good. In the same way let us embrace with patience the loss of property, the failure of our expectations, or even the loss of those who were helping us. Let us be resigned at such times to the will of God, and God will help us; and if he should not then help us as we should wish, let us be content with whatever he may do, because he will do it to try our patience, that he may enrich us with greater merits and the goods of heaven.

In the fourth place, we must accept patiently contempt and persecutions. You will say: "But what evil have I done, that I should be so persecuted? Why have I had to suffer such an affront?" My brother, go and say this to Jesus Christ on the cross, and he will answer: "And I, what have I done, that I should have to suffer such sorrow and ignominy, and this death of the cross?"

If, then, Jesus Christ has suffered so much for the love of you, it is no great thing that you should suffer this little for the love of Jesus Christ. Particularly if you have ever during your life committed some grievous sin, think that you deserve to be in hell, where you would have to suffer much greater contempt and persecution from the devils. If also you should be persecuted for having done good, rejoice exceedingly. Hear what Jesus Christ says: *Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake.*[1] Let us be convinced of the truth of what the Apostle says, that he who would live united with Jesus Christ in this world must be persecuted.

In the fifth place, we must practise patience also in spiritual desolations, which are the heaviest afflictions for a soul that loves God. But God in this way proves the love of his beloved ones. At such times let us humble ourselves and be resigned to the will of God, putting ourselves entirely into his hands. Let us be most careful also not to leave off any of our devotions, our prayers, frequenting of the sacraments, our visits to the Blessed Sacrament, or our spiritual reading. As we do everthing then with weariness and trouble, it seems to us to be all lost, but it is not so: while we persevere in all these things, we work without any satisfaction to ourselves; but it is very pleasing to God.

In the sixth and last place, we must practise patience in temptations. Some cowardly souls, when a temptation lasts a long time, are disheartened, and will sometimes even say: God, then, desires my damnation. No; God permits us to be tempted, not for our damnation, but for our advantage, that we may then humble ourselves the more, and unite ourselves more closely to him, by forcing ourselves to resist, redoubling our prayers, and thereby acquiring greater merits for heaven. *And*

[1] "Beati, qui persecutionem patiuntur propter justitiam."—*Matt.* v. 10.

because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.[1] Thus was it said to Tobias. Every temptation which we overcome gains for us fresh degrees of glory, and greater strength to resist future temptations. Nor does God ever permit us to be tempted beyond our strength: *And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.*[2]

We should, however, beg our Lord to deliver us from temptations; notwithstanding, when they come, let us resign ourselves to his holy will, beseeching him to give us strength to resist. St. Paul was troubled with carnal temptations, and he prayed to God to deliver him from them; but the Lord said to him: *My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity.*[3] In sensual temptations especially the first precaution to be taken is to remove ourselves as far as possible from all occasions, and then immediately to have recourse to Jesus Christ for help, not trusting in our own strength. And when the temptation continues, let us not cease to pray, saying: "Jesus, help me! Mary, ever Virgin, assist me!" The mere invocation of these all-powerful names of Jesus and Mary will suffice to defeat the most violent assaults of hell. It is also of great use to make the sign of the cross on our forehead, or over our heart. By the sign of the cross, St. Anthony Abbot overcame similar attacks of the devil. It is also a very good thing to acquaint your spiritual father with your temptations. St.

[1] "Quia acceptus eras Deo, necesse fuit ut tentatio probaret te."—*Tob.* xii. 13.

[2] "Fidelis autem Deus est, qui non patietur vos tentari supra id quod potestis: sed faciet etiam cum tentatione proventum."—1 *Cor.* x. 13.

[3] "Sufficit tibi, Paule, gratia mea; nam virtus in infirmitate perficitur."—2 *Cor.* xii. 9.

Philip Neri used to say: "A temptation which is manifested is half overcome."

§ 5 The Practice of Conformity to the Will of God.

All sanctity consists in loving God; and the love of God consists in fulfilling his holy will. In this is our life: *And life in His good will.*[1] And he who is always united with the will of God is always in peace; for the divine will takes away the bitterness of every cross. By saying, God wills it so, God has so willed, holy souls find peace in all their labors: *Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad.*[2] You say: Everything goes wrong with me; God sends me all kinds of misfortunes. Things go wrong with you, my friend, because you make them go wrong; if you were to be resigned to the will of God, all would go well, and for your good. The crosses which God sends you are misfortunes, because you make them misfortunes; if you would take them with resignation, they would no longer be misfortunes, but riches for paradise. Ven. Balthazar Alvarez says: "He who in his troubles resigns himself with peacefulness to the divine will, runs to God post-haste." Let us now come to the practice.

And first, let us resign ourselves in the sicknesses which befall us. Worldly people call illnesses misfortunes, but the saints call them visitations of God and favors. When we are ill we ought certainly to take remedies in order to be cured, but we should always be resigned to whatever God disposes. And if we pray for restoration to health, let it always be done with resignation, otherwise we shall not obtain the favor. But how much do we not gain when we are ill by offering to God all we suffer! He who loves God from his heart

[1] "Et vita in voluntate ejus."—*Ps.* xxix. 6.

[2] "Non contristabat justum, quidquid ei acciderit."—*Prov.* xii. 21.

does not desire to be cured of his illness in order not to suffer, but he desires to please God by suffering. It was this love which made the scourge, the rack, and the burning pitch sweet to the holy martyrs. We must also be especially resigned in mortal sickness. To accept death at such a time, in order that the will of God may be fulfilled, merits for us a reward similar to that of the martyrs, because they accepted death to please God. He who dies in union with the will of God makes a holy death; and the more closely he is united to it, the more holy death does he die. The Venerable Blosius declares that an act of perfect conformity to the will of God at the hour of death not only delivers us from hell, but also from purgatory.

Secondly, we must also unite ourselves to the will of God with regard to our *natural defects*, as want of talents, being of low birth, weak health, bad sight, want of ability for affairs, and the like. All that we have is the free gift of God. Might he not have made us a fly or a blade of grass? A hundred years ago were we anything but nothingness? And what more do we want? Let it suffice that God has given us the power of becoming saints. Although we may have little talent, poor health, and may be poor and abject, we may very well become saints through his grace if we have the will. Oh, how many unfortunate beings have been damned on account of their talents, their health, high birth, riches or beauty! Let us then be content with what God has done for us; and let us thank him always for the good things he has given us, and particularly for having called us to the holy faith; this is a great gift, and one for which few are found to thank God.

Thirdly, we must resign ourselves in all adversities that may happen to us, as the loss of property, of our expectations, of our relatives; and in the attacks and persecutions we may meet with from men. You will say:

But God does not will sin; how is it that I must resign myself when some one calumniates me, wrongs me, attacks and defrauds me? That cannot happen by the will of God. What a deception is this! God does not will the sin of such a one; he permits it: but, on the other hand, he does will the adversity which you suffer by means of this person. So that it is our Lord himself who sends you that cross, though it comes to you by means of your neighbor; therefore even in these cases you must embrace the cross as coming from God. Nor let us seek to find out a reason for such treatment. St. Teresa says: "If you are willing to bear only those crosses for which you see a reason, perfection is not for you."

Fourthly, we must be resigned in aridity of soul; if, when we say our prayers, make our Communions, visit the Blessed Sacrament, etc., all seems to weary and give us no comfort, let us be satisfied in knowing that we please God, and that the less satisfaction we feel ourselves in our devotions the more pleasure do we give him. At no time can we know better our own insufficiency and misery than in the time of aridity; and therefore let us humble ourselves in our prayers, and put ourselves with resignation into God's hands, and say: "Lord, I do not deserve consolations; I desire nothing but that Thou have pity on me; keep me in Thy grace, and do with me what Thou wilt." And so doing, we shall gain more in one day of desolation than in a month of tears and sensible devotion. And generally speaking, this should be the continual tenor of our prayers, offering ourselves to God, that he may do with us as he pleases; saying to him in our prayers, our Communions, and in the visit: "My God, make me do Thy will." In doing the will of God we shall do everything. For this end let us accustom ourselves to have always on our lips the ejaculation: *Fiat voluntas tua!* "Thy will be done,"

even in the least things we do; for instance, if we snuff out a candle, break a glass, or stumble over something, let us always repeat; "May the will of God be done!" When we lose any of our possessions, or when one of our relatives dies, or anything else of the same sort happens to us, let us say: "O Lord, it is Thy will, it is my will also." And when we fear any temporal ill, let us say: "O Lord, I will whatever Thou willest." Thus we shall be very pleasing in the sight of God, and shall be always in peace.

§ 6. The Practice of Purity of Intention.

Purity of intention consists in doing everything with the sole view of pleasing God. The good or bad intention with which an action is performed renders it good or bad before God. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi says: "God rewards actions according to the amount of purity of intention with which they are done." Let us examine the practice of it.

In the first place, in all our exercises (of devotion), let us seek God and not ourselves: if we seek our own satisfaction we cannot expect to receive any reward from God. And this holds good for all spiritual works. How many labor and exhaust themselves in preaching, hearing confessions, serving at the altar, and in doing other pious works; and because in these they seek themselves and not God, they lose all! When we seek neither approbation nor thanks from others for what we do, it is a sign that we work for God's sake: as also when we are not vexed at the good we undertake not succeeding; or when we rejoice as much at any good that is done by others, as if it had been done by ourselves. Further, whenever we have done some good in order to please God, let us not torment ourselves in endeavoring to drive away vain-glory; if we are praised for it; it is enough to say: "To God be the honor and glory." And let us never omit doing any

good action which may be edifying to our neighbor, through fear of vain-glory. Our Lord wishes us to do good even before others, that it may be profitable to them: *So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*[1] Therefore when you do good, have first the intention of pleasing God; and secondly, that also of giving a good example to your neighbor.

In the second place, in our bodily actions; whether we work, eat, drink, or amuse ourselves with propriety, let us do all in order to please God. Purity of intention may be called the heavenly alchemy, which changes iron into gold; by which is meant, that the most trivial and ordinary actions when done to please God become acts of divine love. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi used to say: "A person who performs all his actions with a pure intention will go straight to paradise." A holy hermit, before putting his hand to any work, used to raise his eyes to heaven, and keep them fixed there for a short time; and when he was asked what he was doing, he answered: "I am taking my aim, so that I may not miss the mark." Let us also do in like manner: before beginning any action, let us make sure of our aim, and say: "Lord, I do this to please Thee."

§ 7. Rules for avoiding Tepidity.

Souls that make no account of venial sins, and give themselves up to tepidity, without a thought of freeing themselves from it, live in great danger. We do not here speak of those venial sins that are committed by mere frailty, such as useless or idle words, interior disquietudes, and negligence in small matters; but we speak of venial sins committed with full deliberation, above all when they are

[1] "Sic luceat lux vestra coram hominibus, ut videant opera vestra bona, et glorificent Patrem vestrum."—*Matt.* v. 16.

habitual. St. Teresa writes thus: "From all deliberate sin, howsoever small it may be, O Lord, deliver us!" Ven. Alvarez used to say: "Those little backbitings, dislikes, culpable curiosity, acts of impatience and intemperance, do not indeed kill the soul, but they so weaken it, that when any great temptation takes it unexpectedly, it will not have strength enough to resist, and will consequently fall." So that as on the one hand deliberate venial sins weaken the soul, so on the other do they deprive us of the divine assistance; for it is but just that God should be sparing with those who are sparing towards him: *He who soweth sparingly, shall also reap sparingly.*[1] And that is what a soul that has received special graces from God has the most reason to fear. Still more ought it to fear lest such faults should be caused by some passionate attachment, as of ambition, or avarice, or of aversion, or inordinate affection towards any person. It happens not unfrequently to souls that are in bondage to some passion, as it does to gamblers, who, after losing many times, at the last throw say, "Let us risk everything;" and so finish by losing all they have. In what a miserable state is that soul which is the slave of some passion; for passion blinds us, and lets us no longer see what we are doing. Let us now come to the practice of what we have to do, in order to be able to deliver ourselves from the wretched state of tepidity

It is necessary in the first place to have a firm desire to get out of this state. The good desire lightens our labor, and gives us strength to go forward And let us rest assured that he who makes no progress in the way of God will always be going back; and he will go back so far that at last he will fall over some precipice. Secondly, let us try to find out our predominant faults to which we are most attached, whether it be anger, ambi-

[1] "Qui parce seminat, parce et metet."—2 *Cor.* ix. 6.

tion, or inordinate affection to persons or things: a resolute will overcomes all with the help of God. Thirdly, we must avoid the occasion, otherwise all our resolutions will fall to the ground. And lastly, we must above all be diffident of our own strength, and pray continually with all confidence to God, begging him to help us in the danger in which we are, and to deliver us from those temptations by which we shall fall into sin; which is the meaning of the petition, *Ne nos inducas in tentationem*—"Lead us not into temptation." He who prays obtains: *Ask, and you shall receive.*[1] This is a promise of God, and can never fail; therefore we must always pray, always pray; and let us never leave off repeating, "We must pray always, we must pray always; my God help me, and that soon!"

§ 8. The Practice of Devotion towards the Great Mother of God.

As regards this devotion, I hope that the reader is fully persuaded that, in order to insure eternal salvation, it is most important to be devout to the Most Holy Mary. And if he should wish to be still more convinced of it, I would beg him to read the book I have written, called *The Glories of Mary.* We shall here speak only of the practices you may observe, that you may obtain the protection of this sovereign Lady. First, every morning and evening, when you rise and before you go to bed, say three *Hail Marys*, adding this short prayer: "By thy pure and immaculate conception, O Mary, make me pure in body and holy in soul!" And put yourself beneath her mantle, that she may keep you that day or that night from sin. And every time you hear the clock strike, say a *Hail Mary;* do the same whenever you go in or out of the house, and when you pass by any picture or statue of the Blessed Virgin. So also when you begin and finish

[1] "Petite, et accipietis."—*John.* xvi. 24.

any of your occupations, such as your study, work, eating, or sleeping, never omit to say a *Hail Mary*. Secondly, say the Rosary, meditating on the mysteries, every day, at least five decades. Many devout people also say the Office of Our Lady; it would be well to say at least the Little Office of the Name of Mary, which is very short, and composed of five short psalms. Thirdly, say an *Our Father* and *Hail Mary* every day to the ever-blessed Trinity in thanksgiving for the graces that have been bestowed upon Mary. The Blessed Virgin herself revealed to a person that this devotion was very pleasing to her. Fourthly, fast on bread and water every Saturday in honor of Mary, or at least on the vigils of her seven feasts; or at least fast in the ordinary way, or eat only of one dish, or abstain from something you like. In short, make use of some kind of mortification on Saturdays, and on the above-named vigils, for the sake of this Queen, who, as St. Andrew of Crete says, repays these little things with great graces. Fifthly, pay a visit every day to some image of your patroness, and ask her to give you holy perseverance and the love of Jesus Christ. Sixthly, let no day pass without reading a little about Our Lady, or else say some prayer to this Blessed Virgin. For this purpose we have here put seven prayers to Mary, for the seven days of the week (see Chap. II. § 7). Seventhly, make the novenas for the seven principal feasts of Mary, and ask your confessor to tell you what devotions and mortifications you should practise during those nine days: say at least nine *Hail Marys* and *Glory be to the Father*, and beg her each day of the novena to give you some special grace that you need. Lastly, often recommend yourself to this divine Mother during the day, and particularly in time of temptation, saying at such times, and often repeating with great affection, "Mary, help me! help me, my Mother!" And if you love Mary, try to promote devotion to this great

Mother of God among your relatives, friends, and servants.

§ 9. On the Practice of Certain Means by which we may acquire the Love of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ ought to be our whole love. He is worthy of it, both because he is a God of infinite goodness, and because he has loved us to such an excess, that he died for us. Oh, how great are our obligations to Jesus Christ! All the good we enjoy, all our inspirations, calls, pardons, helps, hopes, consolations, sweetnesses, and loving affections, come to us through Jesus Christ. Let us see by what means we are to acquire this love of Jesus Christ.

In the first place, we must desire to have this love of Jesus Christ, and we must, therefore, often ask him to give it us, especially in our prayers, in our Communions, and in the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. And this grace must also be sought for at the hands of the ever-blessed Mary, from our guardian angel and our holy patrons, that they may enable us to love Jesus Christ. St. Francis de Sales says that the grace of loving Jesus Christ contains all other graces in itself; because he who truly loves Jesus Christ cannot be wanting in any virtue.

In the second place, if we wish to acquire the love of Jesus Christ, we must detach our hearts from all earthly affections; divine love will find no place in a heart that is full of this world. St. Philip Neri used to say: "The love we give to creatures is all so much taken from God."

In the third place, we must often exercise ourselves, especially when we pray, in making acts of love to Jesus Christ. Acts of love are the fuel with which we keep alive the fire of holy charity. Let us make acts of love and complacency, saying: "My Jesus, I rejoice that Thou art infinitely happy, and that Thy eternal Father loves Thee as much as himself!" Of benevolence: "I

wish, my Jesus, that all could know and love Thee!" Of predilection, as: "My Jesus, I love Thee more than all things! I love Thee more than myself!" Let us also often make acts of contrition, which are called acts of sorrowful love.

In the fourth place, if any one wishes to make sure of being inflamed with love towards Jesus Christ, let him often try to meditate on his Passion. It was revealed to a holy solitary, that no exercise was more efficacious in enkindling love, than the consideration of the sufferings and ignominy which Jesus Christ endured for love of us. I say, it is impossible that a soul, meditating often on the Passion of Christ, should be able to resist his love. It was for this that, although he could have saved us by one drop of his blood, nay even by a single prayer, he chose to suffer so much, and to shed all his blood, that he might attract all hearts to love him; therefore he who meditates on his Passion does what is very agreeable to him. Do you, then, often make your meditation on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do so at least every Friday, the day on which he died for the love of us. For this purpose I have written many meditations on the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially the *Darts of Fire*,* which speak of the love which Jesus Christ has borne us in the great work of our redemption.

* These will be found in Volume IV. of the ascetical works.—Ed.

ADMONITIONS

Addressed to Persons of all States who Desire to be Saved.*

God wishes us all to be saved: *Who will have all men saved.*[1] "And he is ready to give to all the help necessary for salvation; but he grants it only to those that ask him, as St. Augustine says: "He gives only to those who ask."[2] Hence, it is a common opinion of theologians and of the holy Fathers, that prayer is necessary for adults as a means of salvation; that is to say, that a person who does not pray, and neglects to ask of God the help requisite for overcoming temptations, and for preserving grace already received, cannot be saved.

On the other hand, our Lord cannot refuse to give graces to those who ask for them, because he has promised to do so: *Cry to Me, and I will hear thee.*[3] Have recourse to me, and I will not fail to hear you. Ask of me all you desire, and you shall attain it: *Ask, and it shall be given to you.*[4] These promises, however, are not to be understood with reference to temporal goods, because God only gives these when they are for the good

[1] "Omnes homines vult salvos fieri."—1 *Tim.* ii. 4.

[2] Non dat, nisi petenti.—*In Ps.* cii.

[3] 'Clama ad me, et exaudiam te."—*Jer.* xxxiii. 3.

[4] 'Quodcumque volueritis, petetis, et fiet vobis."—*John*, xv. 7.

* These admonitions on the necessity of prayer and on the devotion to the Blessed Virgin were written or dictated by Saint Alphonsus when he was nearly eighty years of age. See Tannoia, Book 4, ch. 18.—Ed.

of the soul; but he has promised absolutely to give spiritual graces to any one who asks him; and having promised it, he is obliged to give them to us: "By his promise, he has made himself our debtor," says St. Augustine.

It should also be observed, that on God's part prayer is a promise, and on our part a binding precept: *Ask, and it shall be given you.*[1] *We ought always to pray.*[2] These words, "ask, we ought," convey, as St. Thomas teaches, a grave precept, which is binding for our whole life; but especially when a man is in danger of death, of falling into sin; because if he does not then have recourse to God, he will certainly be overcome. And he who has already fallen under God's displeasure commits a fresh sin when he does not turn to God for help to rise out of his miserable state. But will God then hear him while he is yet his enemy? Yes, he does hear, if the sinner humbles himself, and prays for pardon from his heart; since it is written in the Gospel: *For every one that asketh, receiveth.*[3] It says that God has promised to hear all that pray to him, whether they are just or sinners. In another place God says, *Call upon Me . . . and I will deliver Thee.*[4] Call upon Me, and I will deliver thee from hell, to which thou dost stand condemned.

No, there will be no excuse in the day of judgment for any one who dies in mortal sin. It will be of no use for him to say that he had not the strength to resist the temptation which troubled him; because Jesus Christ will answer: If you had not the strength, why did you not ask it of me, and I should certainly have given it you? If you fell into sin, why did you not have recourse to me, that I might have delivered you from it?

[1] "Petite, et dabitur vobis."—*Matt.* vii. 7.
[2] "Oportet semper orare."—*Luke*, xviii. 1.
[3] "Omnis enim qui petit, accipit."—*Luke*, xi. 10.
[4] "Invoca me; . . . eruam te."—*Ps.* xlix. 15.

You see, then, that if you desire to be saved, and would keep yourself in the grace of God, you must often pray to him, that he would keep his hand over you. The Council of Trent declares that for a man to persevere in the grace of God, it is not enough that he should have only that general aid which he gives to all; but he must also have that special assistance which can only be obtained by prayer. For this reason all the Doctors of the Church say, that each one is bound, under grievous sin, to recommend himself often to God, and to ask for the grace of holy perseverance at least once a month. And any one who finds himself in the midst of many dangerous occasions is under the obligation of asking more frequently for the grace of perseverance.

It is besides most useful to keep up some particular devotion to the Mother of God, who is called the Mother of perseverance, in order to obtain this grace; and a person who has not this special devotion to the Blessed Virgin will find it very difficult to persevere; for as St. Bernard says, all divine graces, and especially this one of perseverance, which is the greatest of all, come to us by means of Mary.

Would to God that preachers were more mindful in putting before their hearers this great means of prayer! Some even in the whole course of their Lenten sermons scarcely mention it more than once or twice in passing: while they ought often to make it their chief subject, besides speaking of it in every discourse; if they omit to do so, they will have to render a severe account for it to God. Thus also many confessors are particular merely about the resolution their penitents make not to offend God again, and few take the trouble to inculcate that they must pray when they are tempted again to fall; but we must be well persuaded, that when a temptation is violent, if the penitent does not beg for God's assistance, all his resolutions will avail him little; prayer alone can

save him. It is certain that he who prays is saved; he who prays not is damned.

Therefore, I repeat, if you wish to be saved, pray continually to the Lord that he would give you light and strength not to fall into sin. Thus we must be importunate with God, in asking him for his grace. "This importunity with God is our opportunity," says St. Jerome. Every morning we must beseech him to keep us from sin during that day. And when any bad thought or occasion of sin presents itself to your mind or you are tempted by some dangerous occasion, immediately have recourse to Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin, and say, "My Jesus, help me! Most Blessed Virgin, come to my aid." It is enough at such a time to pronounce the names of Jesus and Mary, and the temptation will vanish; but should the temptation continue, persevere in invoking the assistance of Jesus and Mary, and you will be victorious.

PROTESTATION FOR A HAPPY DEATH.

My God, prostrate in Thy presence, I adore Thee; and I intend to make the following protestations, as if I were on the point of passing from this life to eternity:

My Lord, because Thou art infallible truth, and hast revealed it to the holy Church, I believe in the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; three Persons, but only one God, who eternally rewards the just with heaven, and punishes sinners with hell. I believe that the second Person—that is, the Son of God—became man and died for the salvation of men; and I believe all that the holy Church believes. I thank Thee for having made me a Christian; and I protest that in this holy faith I wish to live and die.

My God, my hope, trusting in Thy promises, I hope from Thy mercy, not through my merits, but through the merits of Jesus Christ, for the pardon of my sins, perseverance in Thy grace, and, after this miserable life, for the glory of heaven. And should the devil, at death, tempt me to despair at the sight of my sins, I protest that I wish always to hope in Thee, my Lord, and that I wish to die in the loving arms of Thy goodness.

O God, worthy of infinite love! I love Thee with my whole heart, and more than I love myself; and I protest that I wish to die making an act of love, that thus I may continue to love Thee for eternity in heaven; which, for this purpose, I ask and desire from Thee. And if, O Lord! instead of loving Thee, I have hitherto despised Thy infinite Goodness, I am sorry for it with my whole

heart, and I protest that I wish to die bewailing and detesting forever the offences I have offered to Thee. I purpose, for the future, to die rather than commit another sin. And, for the love of Thee, I pardon all who have offended me.

O my God! I accept death, and all the pains that will accompany my death. I unite them to the sorrows and to the death of Jesus Christ, and offer them in honor of Thy supreme dominion, and in satisfaction for my sins. O Lord! for the sake of the great sacrifice of himself which Thy divine Son offered on the altar of the cross, accept this sacrifice of my life, which I offer to Thee. I now, for the moment of my death, resign myself entirely to Thy divine will, protesting that I wish to die, saying: *O Lord! Thy will be always done.*

Most holy Virgin Mary, my advocate and my mother, thou, after God, art and shalt be my hope and consolation at the hour of death. I now invoke thee, and pray thee to assist me in that great passage. My dear queen, do not abandon me at that last moment. Come, then, and take my soul, and present it to thy Son. From this moment I expect thee, and hope to die under thy protection and prostrate at thy feet. My protector, St. Joseph, St. Michael the archangel, my angel-guardian, my holy advocates, come all, and assist me in that last battle with hell.

And Thou, my crucified Love—Thou, my Jesus, who, to obtain for me a good death, hast voluntarily chosen so painful a death, remember at that hour that I am one of the sheep which Thou hast purchased with Thy blood. O my Saviour, who alone can console me and save me at that hour when every one on this earth will have abandoned me, and when no friend will be able to assist me! make me then worthy to receive Thee for my Viaticum. Do not permit me to lose Thee forever, and to go forever to remain at a distance from Thee. No, my beloved Sa-

viour; since I now embrace Thee, receive me then into Thy holy wounds. At my last breath I intend to breathe forth my soul into the loving wound in Thy side, saying now, for that moment: Jesus and Mary, I give Thee my heart and my soul: Jesus and Mary, I give Thee my heart and my soul.

Happy suffering, to suffer for God! Happy death, to die in the Lord!

I embrace Thee, my good Redeemer, that I may die in Thy embraces. If, O my soul! at your departure from this world, Mary assists you, and Jesus receives you, death will be for you not death, but sweet repose.

'Tis blessed to suffer, Creator most kind;
'Tis blessed to die, and to suffer for Thee.
I embrace Thee, O Crucified! hoping to find
Thine arms everlasting in death circling me.

So it will not be death, but ineffable rest.
That shall close at the last on these earth-wearied eyes,
When my forehead by Mary is soothingly prest,
And Jesus receives my last penitent sighs.

A Short Prayer to be said every day to Jesus crucified, and to our Lady of Sorrows, to obtain the grace of a happy death.

My Lord Jesus Christ, by that bitterness which Thou didst endure on the cross, when Thy blessed soul was separated from Thy most sacred body, have pity on my sinful soul, when it leaves my miserable body to enter into eternity.

O Mary! by that grief which thou didst experience on Calvary in seeing Jesus expire on the cross before thine eyes, obtain for me a good death, that loving Jesus and thee, my Mother, in this life, I may attain heaven, where I shall love thee for all eternity.

Latin Prayer for the Same Object.

Domine Jesu Christe, per illam amaritudinem quam sustinuit nobilissima anima tua, quando egressa est de benedicto corpore tuo, miserere animæ meæ peccatricis, quando egredietur de corpore meo. Amen.

HYMN.

Mary our Hope.

Mary, thou art hope the brightest,
Love most pure and sweet;
Life and peace I find reposing
At thy blessed feet!

When I call on thee, O Mary!
When I think on thee,
Joy and pleasure all entrancing
Fill my heart with glee.

If anon the clouds of sadness
Rise within my heart,
When they hear thy name, O Mary!
Straightway they depart.

Like a star on life's dark ocean,
Shining o'er the wave,
Thou canst guide my bark to harbor,
Thou my soul canst save.

Under thy protecting mantle,
Queen belov'd, I fly;
There I wish to live securely,
There I hope to die.

If I chance my life to finish
Mary, loving thee,
Then I also know, dear Lady,
Heaven is for me.

Cast thy gentle bonds around me,
And my heart enchain;
Prisoner of love forever,
Safe will I remain.

Thus my heart, O sweetest Mary!
Is not mine, but thine:
Take it; give it all to Jesus;
Ne'er shall it be mine.

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There is nothing more precious than time; but there is nothing less esteemed and more despised by men of the world. This is what St. Bernard deplores when he says: Nothing is more precious than time, but nothing is regarded more cheaply." The same saint adds: "The days of salvation pass away, and no one reflects that day which has passed away from him can never return." You will see a gambler spend nights and days in play. If you ask him what he is doing, his answer is: I am passing the time. You will see others standing several hours in the street, looking at those who pass by, and speaking on obscene or on useless subjects. If you ask them what they are doing, they will say: We are passing the time. Poor blind sinners! who lose so many days; but days which never return.

O time despised during life! you will be ardently desired by worldlings at the hour of death. They will then wish for another year, another month, another day; but they will not obtain it: they will then be told that time shall be no longer. How much would they then pay for another week, or another day, to settle the accounts of their conscience? To obtain a single hour, they would, says St. Laurence Justinian, give all their wealth and worldly possessions. But this hour shall not be given.